Subaru Legacy

THE MOST COMFORTABLE CARS P. 50

BIG SUPERMARKET SAVINGS • HOW TO AVOID INTERNET SCAMS

CR Consumer Reports®

AUGUST 2024

RATINGS & REVIEWS
- Mattresses
- Air Purifiers
- Speakers
- Lawn Mowers
- Air Fryers
- Carpet Cleaners

The Danger in Your DUST

PESTICIDES. PFAS. LEAD.

What's in your home's air can make you sick. INSIDE The top-rated tools that'll help keep your place safe.

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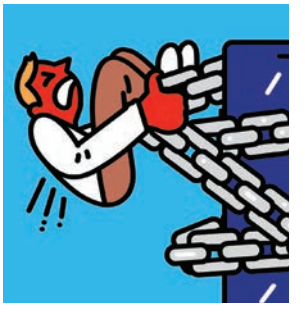

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Hidden Dangers in the Air

EVERY DAY we navigate obstacles that can undermine our personal health. At CR, we're determined to shine a light on the threats that are easy to miss—because they can literally be microscopic.

One example is the almost invisible danger that invades our homes in the form of dust. This issue's cover story highlights the toxic chemicals and harmful microplastics in our dust and how they can hurt us. You can also learn a number of ways to clean up dust—and create less of it—to reduce your risk.

Similarly, there are problems hidden in our cars. A recent study by Green Science Policy Institute and Duke University researchers found that flame retardants—some of which are known to be carcinogenic—can be found in a car's cabin air. Manufacturers add these chemicals to seat foam and other interior parts to meet a 1971 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration flammability standard for vehicle interiors. While preventing fires is important, the new research shows that these requirements may hurt consumers in a different way.

This fire safety standard hasn't been updated in decades, even though safe alternatives do exist. In fact, other flammability standards, like those for upholstered furniture, have already adopted a different type of fire safety test that has led to lower levels of harmful flame retardants in household products.

It's past time for vehicle safety standards to change, which is why CR is calling on NHTSA to update its rules. Consumers deserve modern safeguards, allowing for proven alternatives that keep us safe from fires in our cars and dangers in the air. You can help take action at **CR.org/carchemicals**.

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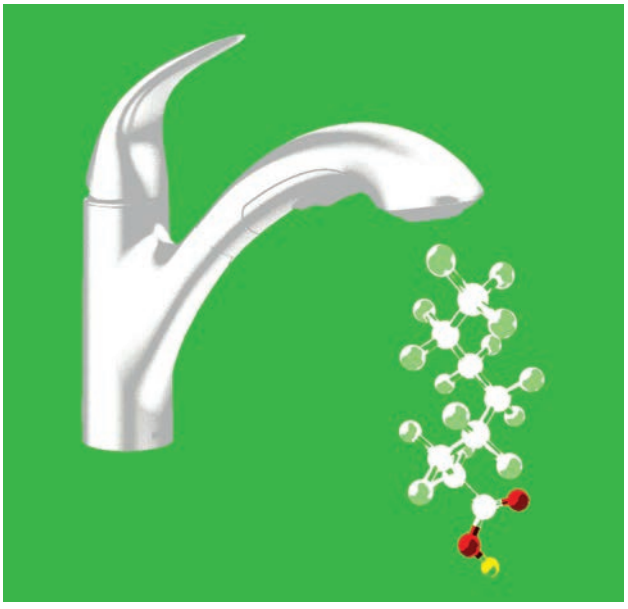

Staying Safe From PFAS

Years of CR advocacy and reporting have culminated in a milestone victory: In April, the Environmental Protection Agency restricted levels of PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) in drinking water, setting the first nationwide, enforceable limits on these "forever chemicals."

The proposal requires municipal water systems to monitor for five individual PFAS chemicals, tell the public what they find, and reduce levels that exceed the new limits. The EPA says the rule will reduce exposure for about 100 million people and prevent thousands of deaths and tens of thousands of illnesses.

PFAS have been used for decades in cookware, outdoor gear, food wrapping, and more, because of their nonstick and stain-resistant properties. They're known as forever chemicals because they persist so long in the environment and in human bodies. One study estimated that 97 percent of American adults have PFAS in their blood. Mounting scientific evidence links the chemicals to health risks, including cancer and lowered immune responses, but no federal rules limited PFAS in drinking water until now.

CR investigations, going back to 2020, found PFAS in a number of consumer products, including food packaging, bottled water, and nonstick cookware. And in 2021, our joint investigation with the Guardian US news organization found alarming levels in U.S. tap water. We also collected 60,000-plus petition signatures asking the EPA to take action.

100 million

Estimated number of Americans whose exposure to PFAS will be reduced by the EPA's new drinking water rule.

Utilities have five years to comply with the EPA's new standards. Meanwhile, go to **CR.org/pfaswaterguide** to learn how to know if PFAS chemicals are in your water and, if so, how to protect your family's health.

SOURCE: ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

ACTION UPDATE

CR has been a strong advocate for the auto safety feature known as automatic emergency braking, or AEB. To incentivize automakers, we've been awarding points in our ratings to vehicles that offer this lifesaving feature standard with pedestrian detection. And over the past year, we've urged the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to require it on all new cars and light trucks—and gathered 24,000-plus consumer signatures in support. In April, NHTSA revealed its rule: New passenger vehicles must have AEB with pedestrian detection by September 2029.

Fixing Credit Reports

WHAT'S AT STAKE

The information in consumer credit reports can affect one's ability to get a mortgage, a loan, or an insurance policy they can afford; to rent an apartment; and even to get a job. Yet credit reports from the three major credit bureaus are notoriously rife with errors—many big enough to affect a consumer's creditworthiness. And such errors can be extremely hard to correct.

WHAT CR IS DOING ABOUT IT

CR has been highlighting this issue for years and also tracking efforts by the credit bureaus and their regulators to address it. But a new CR study suggests that much more progress is needed.

With the personal finance nonprofit WorkMoney, we recruited more than 4,300 volunteers to check their credit reports and tell us what they found. An alarming number—25 percent—said they were unable to access their reports at all, some because they couldn't get past the security questions, while others were thwarted by error messages.

Worse, more than a quarter of those who could check their reports found errors that were serious enough to potentially affect their creditworthiness. These included accounts and debt collections they didn't recognize, and on-time payments that were wrongly reported as late or missed. Mistakes like these can lower a consumer's credit score by hundreds of points.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

To learn more, and get advice on how to protect your credit record, read about our report at **CR.org/creditcheckup**. And help us fix the problem by signing our petition urging the three credit bureaus to do more to ensure that credit reports are accurate, at **CR.org/crediterrors**.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN RITTER

Produce Without Pesticides
20%
SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE
TOP-RATED CAR REPAIR SHOPS
LOWER YOUR ENERGY BILLS RIGHT NOW
CREDIT CARDS WITH AMAZING PERKS
CR Consumer Reports
838
PRODUCTS RATED & REVIEWED
PRODUCE WITHOUT PESTICIDES
Your favorite fruits and veggies may contain harmful chemicals. INSIDE: The safer choices—and the ones to avoid.

Our May/June 2024 cover story, **"Produce Without Pesticides,"** reported on the harmful levels of chemicals in some fruits and vegetables and offered ways to reduce your exposure. Readers shared their thoughts and questions. To add yours, head to **CR.org/pesticidesinproduce**.

DO [THE FRUITS AND VEGETABLES] not mentioned in the article have levels of pesticides that are low enough not to raise concerns? Kale and mustard greens have high levels of pesticides, for example, but what about other greens–like collard greens? What about cauliflower? What about frozen wild blueberries?
–Michael Vermillion, Lansdowne, VA

EDITOR'S NOTE *The types of produce not featured in our ratings aren't necessarily pesticide-free, unfortunately. We examined seven years' worth of data from the Department of Agriculture's Pesticide Data Program, which did include cauliflower and collard greens. Domestic conventional collard greens are of moderate risk in our analysis, which means you can safely eat up to three servings per day. Nonorganic domestic cauliflower poses a very low risk. As for frozen wild blueberries, the data we have from the USDA isn't specific enough to tell us whether they differ from cultivated ones when it comes to their pesticide risk. But we know that frozen conventional blueberries on the whole pose a very high pesticide risk, so it's safest to choose organic blueberries whenever possible.*

CAN PESTICIDES go through the skin and enter the body of fruit? If we remove the skin from apples or melon, for example, are they safe? Thank you very much for the great article.
–Bill Grant, Groton, CT

EDITOR'S NOTE *Peeling produce that has an edible skin, like apples and potatoes, probably does remove some of the pesticides sprayed on the food. But pesticides can be absorbed into the body of the fruit or vegetable through the skin. Also, some pesticides are applied to the soil and absorbed by the whole plant. So you can't count on peeling the skin to eliminate pesticide-related risk.*

I FOUND THIS ARTICLE to be an eye-opener. I would like to know if one's body can get rid of pesticides over the years, or do they accumulate and become part of the cell structure?
–Richard Young, Dundalk, MD

EDITOR'S NOTE *Our bodies do eliminate a number of pesticides quickly. But you can be exposed again each time you consume food. That risk is particularly acute during sensitive stages of development, such as in pregnancy and when children are young. And while most of a particular pesticide may be broken down and eliminated by the body, a small amount can linger. For example, glyphosate (found in Roundup and some other weed control products) is said to be excreted by the body. But a tiny percentage of the chemical may remain.*

WRITE

Go to CR.org/lettertoeditor to share your comments for publication.

PRIVACY PRECAUTIONS

IN "PROTECTING YOUR PRIVACY" in the May/June issue, CR urges legislation to limit the sharing of personal digital data by shining a light on the "surveillance economy." That's why I carefully read "Your Home Security Toolkit" in the same issue. I'm deeply suspicious of video/audio that could be used by criminals or law enforcement. The article offers no advice about how to avoid this type of data sharing. Google owns Nest; Amazon owns Blink and Ring. Both of those companies make fortunes through data mining. Why do they not receive the lowest grades for data security and data privacy?
–George Henderson, San Diego

EDITOR'S NOTE *We review each company's privacy policies and terms of service against the Digital Standard and use those evaluations as part of the testing that determines the overall privacy and security score. In our past tests, the companies you mention have generally received high scores for data security but low scores for data privacy because they collect your data to use for their own purposes. To keep your videos private, your best bet is to use a camera with either end-to-end encryption or local video storage, where the video is stored on a micro-SD card or USB drive, not on the manufacturer's servers. CR recommends a number of video doorbells with local video storage, including the TP-Link Kasa Smart Doorbell KD110, $40, and the Aqara G4 SVD-KIT1, $120. Ring doorbells offer end-to-end encryption, as do models that use Apple's HomeKit Secure Video, but those work only with Apple devices.*

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SAFER DETERGENTS

REGARDING THE LAUNDRY and dish detergent ratings in "CR's Ultimate Guide to Home Cleanup" in the May/June issue: I was puzzled that there was no mention of the plastic coating on most of the detergent pacs—especially given your recent focus on PFAS and other harmful plastics that are increasingly in our water supplies. Have you studied these pacs?
—Lisa Rogers, Boise, ID

EDITOR'S NOTE *Although CR hasn't conducted our own studies on the coatings on detergent pacs, we have researched and reported on them. For these, the concern is not PFAS but polyvinyl alcohol, or PVA, which is designed to dissolve once it comes into contact with water (as it does during washing machine and dishwasher cycles). PVA is even sometimes used as a coating for pills. The Environmental Protection Agency and the European Union agree that PVA isn't a health safety concern—in fact, PVA is on the EPA's Safer Chemical Ingredients List. That said, while PVA is biodegradable, that process depends on certain enzymes and microorganisms being present—and the conditions at wastewater treatment plants can vary. For now, liquid or powder detergent or tablets that aren't coated with PVA may be the best choice for the environment.*

WHY DOESN'T CR TEST more natural products? There were no natural options in the laundry and dish detergent sections.
—Joe Gilliland-Lloyd, Waukesha, WI

WHAT'S THE RIGHT WATER TEMPERATURE?

Regarding the advice in "Lower Your Energy Bills Right Now" in the May/June issue: Isn't it recommended to set water heaters to a temperature higher than 120° F to ensure that dishes are sanitized when washed in the dishwasher and sink?
—Mark Bloomberg, West New York, NJ

EDITOR'S NOTE *Safety experts advise against water heater settings above 120° F. Six seconds of exposure to 140° F water or 30 seconds to 130° F water will cause a burn, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Washing dishes in warm, soapy water will get them clean. Today's dishwashers have heat boosters that raise the temperature of the wash water to 140° F and higher to sanitize dishes.*

EDITOR'S NOTE *You'll be happy to hear that CR has expanded testing of less-toxic cleaning products and will continue to do so. In our latest laundry detergent tests, for example, we included several formulas marketed as "free & gentle," meaning they're without dyes, perfumes, phosphates, phthalates, 1,4-dioxane, and a number of other potentially harmful substances. Last summer we analyzed five popular detergents for the presence of heavy metals and other chemicals. The good news: None of them had concerning levels of those substances, and two—All Stainlifters Free Clear and Seventh Generation Free & Clear Liquid Sensitive Skin—had none of those chemicals at all. The not-so-good news: In our lab tests, "natural" and nontoxic cleaning formulas don't clean as well as conventional products, so they often land toward the bottom of our performance-based ratings. That's why they weren't included in the ratings section in "CR's Ultimate Guide to Home Cleanup." Digital or All Access members can find our complete detergent ratings at* ***CR.org****.*

E-BIKE BENEFITS

I WANT TO PUT IN A PLUG for your May/June article "Getting Around Town More Easily." I am a retiree with health issues and was talked into a pedal-assist e-bike to get more fit. It has been amazingly fun and efficient; I hardly use my car. I can go most places because the battery extends my range, and with saddle bags, I can even get in some shopping. Best of all, I feel better and have lost 40 pounds!
—Karla Smith, Tampa, FL

ILLUSTRATION BY JASON SCHNEIDER

What We're Testing in Our Labs ...

In our 63 labs, we continually review and rate products. Here, timely picks for this month.

Portable Grills

WE TESTED: 27 models
WE TEST FOR: How quickly a model preheats, how evenly it cooks food, how wide the temperature range is, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 62
Range: 41-74

BEST PERFORMANCE (BUT REQUIRES A 20-LB. FUEL TANK)
Broil King Porta-Chef 320 952654
$380

74 OVERALL SCORE

SPEEDY PREHEATING
Coleman RoadTrip 285
$300

71 OVERALL SCORE

LARGE COOKING SURFACE
Weber Traveler 9010001
$400

70 OVERALL SCORE

Innerspring Mattresses

WE TESTED: 172 models
WE TEST FOR: A model's support for large/tall, average, and petite side sleepers and back sleepers; durability; stability; firmness; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 70
Range: 45-84

FIRM, AND TOP PICK OVERALL
Avocado Green
$1,800

84 OVERALL SCORE

SOFTER, WITH COOL COMFORT
Denver Mattress Doctor's Choice Plush
$800

82 OVERALL SCORE

MEDIUM-FIRM AND COOLEST
Parachute Eco
$2,400

81 OVERALL SCORE

Ask Our Experts

How can I tell if a mattress will keep me cool at night?

IN ADDITION TO TESTING mattresses for support, durability, and stability, CR checks to see which mattresses trap less heat than others. And what we've found is that innerspring or hybrid mattresses (which combine foam layers over steel coils) are better at keeping sleepers cool. The coils inside provide more space for air to flow, which may lead to less body heat getting trapped. Conversely, we've found that many all-foam models—even some that have claims for containing a "cooling gel"—aren't great for hot sleepers. "A large percentage of foam mattresses retain warmth," says Chris Regan, who oversees CR's mattress testing.

ILLUSTRATION: JOSEPH CARRINGTON. PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS; MANUFACTURERS

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY | CR GREEN CHOICE

For the latest ratings of these and other product categories, readers with a Digital or All Access membership can go to **CR.org.**

Portable Speakers

WE TESTED: 87 wireless Bluetooth models
WE TEST FOR: Sound quality; ease of use, including setup and controls; and versatility, which checks for features like pairing with another speaker.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 50
Range: 21-64

EASY TO USE
Klipsch Gig XXL
$170

64 OVERALL SCORE

TOP SOUND QUALITY
Ultimate Ears Hyperboom
$400

64 OVERALL SCORE

NICE PRICE & ROLLS ON WHEELS LIKE A SUITCASE
Onn Large Party Speaker Gen. 2
$120

63 OVERALL SCORE

Carpet Cleaners

WE TESTED: 21 models
WE TEST FOR: How well a model removes carpet stains, how noisy it is during use, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 63
Range: 31-78

SUPERIOR CLEANING POWER
Bissell ProHeat 2X Revolution Pet Pro Plus 3588F
$260

78 OVERALL SCORE

RUNNER-UP
Shark CarpetXpert EX201
$250

74 OVERALL SCORE

BARGAIN BUY
Hoover PowerDash Pet Advanced FH55000
$140

72 OVERALL SCORE

Freezers

WE TESTED: 24 upright models
WE TEST FOR: Temperature uniformity, thermostat control, and energy efficiency. We also measure a freezer's usable capacity in cubic feet (listed at right).

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 71
Range: 41-84

BEST LARGE CAPACITY
GE FUF21DLRWW
17.5 cu. ft.
$950

84 OVERALL SCORE

BEST MIDSIZED MODEL
Frigidaire FFFU16F2VW
13.5 cu. ft.
$650

80 OVERALL SCORE

BEST FOR SMALL SPACES & VERY ENERGY-EFFICIENT
GE FUF14DLRWW
11.4 cu. ft.
$750

79 OVERALL SCORE

Battery Lawn Mowers

WE TESTED: 73 models
WE TEST FOR: How much grass a mower can cut on a single charge; how long it takes to recharge; how easy it is to push, pull, and turn the mower; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 75
Range: 44-89

TOP SELF-PROPELLED
Greenworks MO80L421
$750

88 OVERALL SCORE

TOP RIDING MOWER
Ego ZT4204L
$5,000

86 OVERALL SCORE

FIRST-RATE PUSH MODEL
Ryobi RY401220
$750

83 OVERALL SCORE

Note: *We rate different products according to different testing protocols; as a result, Overall Scores of one product category are not comparable with another.*

COMING NEXT MONTH Chainsaws & More

Is it possible to get a good deal on a used EV?

ABSOLUTELY. While used electric vehicles (EVs) were once hard to find and pricey, their cost has plunged by 36 percent in the past two years, according to Group Gordon, a strategic communications firm. This has been driven, at least in part, by price reductions on new EVs and expanded federal tax incentives. But while shopping for a good deal, there are a few pitfalls you'll want to avoid.

Your first concern should be the car's battery. Most EV manufacturers offer an eight-year, 100,000-mile warranty on an auto's propulsion battery and drivetrain. Certified pre-owned EVs go through an EV-specific inspection in which the battery is tested before the car is sold, but in other types of sales, you'll need to have a mechanic check the battery. The inspection may cost you $200 or more and take at least an hour, says Michael Crossen, a CR mechanic. During the inspection, ask if a charging limit was set on the battery. If there is one, that's good news: That prevents the battery from charging to 100 percent, which is better for its long-term health.

Also check the tires of any vehicle you're interested in. EVs are much heavier than comparable gas cars, so their tires tend to wear out faster. That may mean factoring the price of replacement tires into your overall purchase cost. And as with any car, CR recommends searching for any open recalls before buying.

Among used EVs, the 2019 Kia Niro EV and 2021 Tesla Model Y stand out as good choices with proven reliability, our experts say. Models with below-average reliability in our ratings should be approached with caution. To browse through all of our reliability ratings on specific models, go to **CR.org/reliability**.

LEARN

We have more than 140 in-house experts who research, test, and compare. Submit your questions at CR.org/askourexperts ... and watch for the answers.

My clothes are still damp after a full cycle in my dryer. Is it time to replace it?

IT DEPENDS on your dryer's age. If it's less than 10 years old (the average life expectancy of many dryers), the fix might be to give it a good cleaning.

Your dryer's sensors, which help the appliance determine when to end an automatic drying cycle, can collect lint and dust over time, which will stop it from working properly. (Dryer sheets can cause even faster buildup.) The sensors are usually located just inside the dryer, underneath the door. To clean them, wipe them with a cotton ball dipped in rubbing alcohol. Repeat this every two months. Be sure to empty the lint screen after every load because accumulated lint will hamper airflow, which will prolong drying time. And vacuum out the vent duct four times a year.

If your dryer is more than 10 years old and cleaning the sensors and lint screen doesn't fix the problem, it may be time to call a repair professional or get a replacement dryer. To help you decide whether it's better to repair or replace your current model, use our calculation tool at **CR.org/brokendryer**.

Will a bug zapper protect me from mosquitoes?

BUG-ZAPPING DEVICES, which use ultraviolet light to attract flying insects and then give them a deadly jolt, haven't been found to protect people from mosquitoes. "When you hear a zapper go all night, it's killing moths and beetles—beneficial insects—and very few, if any, mosquitoes," says Daniel Markowski, PhD, technical adviser to the American Mosquito Control Association.

You'll have more success with traps that target mosquitoes, like an autocidal gravid ovitrap (AGO trap), which you place in cool, shaded areas around your yard. (You'll need about two traps per half-acre.) These bucket-shaped traps lure female mosquitoes that breed in still water. Catchmaster Ovi-Catch AGO traps ($70 for a pair) have a scented solution inside to attract mosquitoes, but a screen prevents the females from laying their eggs in it properly. Then the trapped mosquitoes die.

In addition to traps, take a weekly walk around your yard to find and clear out spots where water collects. And protect yourself with a good insect repellent, like our top-rated Ben's Tick & Insect Repellent Wipes, $4.75. Outdoor fans can also help keep mosquitoes away from a porch or patio.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOSEPH CARRINGTON

CR Insights

PRODUCT RECOMMENDATIONS AND PRACTICAL ADVICE

IN THE KNOW

Get Your Tiles and Grout Really Clean

Finding cleansers that will actually remove mold, mildew, and dirt from your tiles and grout isn't easy, and it can be pricey, too. Some bottles cost as much as $20. "I've tried cleansers that did next to nothing," says CR reporter Pang-Chieh Ho. "Even with scrubbing, the grout stains wouldn't budge."

So we set out to find products that actually work–and we uncovered a few. Our top picks, shown here, whitened grout and cleaned tiles with minimal scrubbing. Before you use any cleanser, though, read the label carefully: Some can't be used on stone or on certain types of grout.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Goo Gone Grout and Tile Cleaner $8 *(shown at right)*

This foaming spray whitened grout and cleaned tiles in about 2 minutes—at half the price of many others we tried. It has a light, fresh scent.

RUNNER-UP

Clean-eez Grout-eez Tile and Grout Cleaner $22

Grout-eez made both tile and grout noticeably whiter in our trials. But it's best to use just on floors because the clear liquid drips down walls, which was messy and made cleaning more difficult.

BRIGHTENS (BUT SMELLS LIKE BLEACH)

Clorox Plus Tilex Mold & Mildew Remover $5.49

This powerful spray cleaned tile with zero scrubbing. But several staffers complained that it smelled too much of bleach, making it less pleasant to use than other options.

GOOD FOR STONE TILE

Black Diamond Ultimate Grout Cleaner $15

While some staffers said this cleaned their dirty grout in about 3 minutes, others were less impressed with their results. This product is labeled as being safe for use on stone tiles.

PHOTO: PROP STYLING BY MEGUMI EMOTO (GOO GONE). OTHER PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS

PHOTOGRAPH BY GREGORY REID

COUNTERTOP INTELLIGENCE

An Easy Way to Make Ice

If the icemaker in your fridge can't keep up with your need for cubes over the summer months, or you don't have an icemaker, you might want to try a countertop model: These plug-in appliances, which use a refillable water reservoir, can make as much as 24 to 38 pounds of the cold stuff in one day. Our tests of 10 models found that the GE icemaker, shown below, is the speediest (churning out 5 pounds of ice in 5 hours), but it's also far pricier than the others we recommend, like the AGlucky model, at right. A quick tip: For the most ice, fill the icemaker with the coldest water you have, says CR tester Bernie Deitrick.

GE Profile Opal 2.0 Stainless Steel Icemaker XPIO13SCSS $499

- 5/5 SPEED
- 5/5 CAPACITY
- 4/5 NOISE
- 2/5 EFFICIENCY

91 OVERALL SCORE

Vivohome Electric Portable Icemaker VH289-BK $130

76 OVERALL SCORE

- 4/5 SPEED
- 3/5 CAPACITY
- 4/5 NOISE
- 5/5 EFFICIENCY

AGlucky Countertop Icemaker Z5876-BLACK $80

74 OVERALL SCORE

- 4/5 SPEED
- 3/5 CAPACITY
- 3/5 NOISE
- 5/5 EFFICIENCY

Magic Chef Portable Countertop Icemaker $159

71 OVERALL SCORE

- 4/5 SPEED
- 3/5 CAPACITY
- 4/5 NOISE
- 4/5 EFFICIENCY

Frigidaire Icemaker EFIC117-SS $109

70 OVERALL SCORE

- 3/5 SPEED
- 3/5 CAPACITY
- 4/5 NOISE
- 5/5 EFFICIENCY

PHOTOS: GE (ICEMAKER, LEFT); CORBIS/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES (1930S DUST BOWL); CONSUMER REPORTS

CR Time Traveler DUST

1930s A severe drought creates a catastrophic dust bowl in America's Great Plains. Some 7,000 people will die from inhaling the dust.

1943 About 6 million women are now working in factories and fields, which exposes them to toxic dust, CR says. We suggest clothes that expose minimal skin, like coveralls.

1950 We test the Brushoff handheld brush and say it does a good job of removing dust and lint from clothes, upholstery, and more.

1960 Air quality is deteriorating, CR reports, with smoke, dust, ash, and more in it. We say it's a health risk and call for control measures to reduce pollution.

1974 In a test of 54 vacuums, the Filter Queen is different due to its canister with no bag. We don't like that it releases dust into the air when you empty it.

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY

TECH UPDATE

3 Lifesaving Smartwatch Features

These functions on your smartwatch could help protect you in an emergency. Don't own a smartwatch? Knowing more about them may help you decide to get yourself one.

It Sounds the Alarm When You're in Trouble

Smartwatches are getting better at sensing when you need help. Newer Apple, Garmin, Google, and Samsung watches have a gyroscope and an accelerometer that can detect a fall. If you do fall, the watch vibrates and sounds an alarm. If you confirm you're okay—typically within 60 seconds—it stops. Otherwise the watch alerts emergency services or an emergency contact. Similarly, some watches detect when you've been in a car accident and call 911. If you need to attract help from others nearby, the Apple Watch Ultra can also sound a siren if you press and hold the Action button.

It Can Let Loved Ones Know You're Okay

Want to make sure a family member or friend knows you got home safely? The Google Pixel Watch 2 has a Safety Check feature, which you can turn on before a long drive or hike, for example. The feature sets a "check-in timer" that notifies your emergency contact if you don't get to your planned destination by a certain preset time. The wearer also gets a reminder before the Safety Check timer is up so that you can confirm you're fine but just need more time. If you don't respond, the watch will automatically alert your designated contact and share your physical location with them.

It Can Provide Quick Access to Important Medical Information

A Medical ID provides information about you that may be important in an emergency, like allergies and medical conditions. For example, you can set up a Medical ID in the Health app on your iPhone so that the same information is also available on your Apple Watch. That way, your watch can send your medical information directly to emergency services when you call or text 911, or someone attending to you could view it on your wrist. To set up your Medical ID on an iPhone, go to Settings, then select Health.

ICONS: RODRIGO DAMATI. PHOTOS: APPLE (SMARTWATCH); CONSUMER REPORTS

1985 Tabletop air cleaners promise to clear home air of smoke, dust, and pollen, but many we test are useless. Only a couple, like those shown here, are effective.

1993 A bad vacuum cleaner can make allergies worse by kicking up dust instead of trapping it, CR says. In tests, we find that upright models pick up dirt from carpets best.

2010 We share lots of tips to reduce indoor air pollution, such as putting dust-mite-proof covers on bedding and using fans in the kitchen.

2016 Allergies? CR recommends buying a vacuum that has a HEPA filter to capture more fine dust, like this Kenmore bagged canister model, $300.

2024 Our latest report on the health hazards of dust includes the best tools for improving air quality at home, like this air purifier. Turn to page 28 to learn more.

Blueair Blue Pure 211i Max
$349

82 OVERALL SCORE

For more ratings of the best air purifiers, vacuums, and more, turn to page 24.

FOOD IQ™

Great Grains in Just 90 Seconds

"Whole grains, like wild or brown rice and barley, are packed with a lot of fiber and other nutrients, but they can take up to an hour to cook on the stove," says Amy Keating, RD, a CR nutritionist. Thankfully, there's a faster way: Microwavable pouches containing precooked grains are typically ready in just 90 seconds. And, these days, with different grain blends, flavorful seasonings, veggies, and beans mixed in, they're far from boring.

One caveat: Some of these instant grain mixes can be high in sodium. In our nutritional evaluation of over 25 products, some had more than 500 mg of sodium in just 1 cup. For our favorite grain mixes that are lower in sodium, see the picks below. (Nutrition information is for a 1-cup serving.)

EXPERT TIP To turn your grain mixes into a meal, add a protein like grilled chicken and fresh veggies, such as corn and baby spinach, for extra fiber and antioxidants.

BEST MULTIGRAIN BLEND

Seeds of Change Organic Seven Whole Grains $3.99
(also shown above)

CALORIES **260**
SODIUM **310 mg** CARBS **50 g**
FIBER **5 g** PROTEIN **6 g**

This pouch offers a nice amount of fiber and a wide mix of grains, including brown and wild rice, barley, rye, red quinoa, bulgur wheat, and millet.

BEST BROWN RICE & QUINOA

Good & Gather (Target) 90 Second Brown Rice, Quinoa & Red Rice With Flaxseeds $2.39

CALORIES **260**
SODIUM **310 mg** CARBS **43 g**
FIBER **3 g** PROTEIN **6 g**

We like this grain mix because it has a short ingredients list and is seasoned with a fairly low amount of salt.

BEST GRAIN AND BEAN BLEND

Ben's Original 10 Medley Tomato & Herbs $3.49

CALORIES **220**
SODIUM **200 mg** CARBS **41 g**
FIBER **7 g** PROTEIN **6 g**

This medley includes barley, brown rice, chickpeas, green beans, garlic, basil, red chili, and more. It also has less than half the sodium of other bean-blend pouches from brands like Whole Foods.

BEST BROWN RICE

Seeds of Change Organic Brown & Wild Rice with Tomato & Roasted Garlic $3.99

CALORIES **250**
SODIUM **280 mg** CARBS **49 g**
FIBER **4 g** PROTEIN **6 g**

We found that this Seeds of Change mix had about half as much sodium as other seasoned brown rices, like Ben's Original.

TOP PHOTO: GREGORY REID; PROP STYLING BY MEGUMI EMOTO. OTHER PHOTOS: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS

Going Abroad? Get Passports (and More) Fast

Before you take your next international trip, use this guide to make sure you have the right documents in time for takeoff.

YOUR PASSPORT

If you already have a U.S. passport, check its expiration date. An adult passport lasts 10 years–but many countries require that it be valid at least six months past the date of your trip. To renew (or get one for the first time), go to travel.state.gov.

How fast can you get it?

Processing can take six to eight weeks when you submit an application or renewal by mail. To get yours processed in two to three weeks, you can pay a $60 "expedite fee" on top of the $130 passport cost. If you need to travel abroad within 14 days, go to passportappointment.travel.state.gov to book an in-person appointment. You'll need to bring printed proof of your travel date, such as an airline ticket receipt, and pay a $60 expedite fee.

A NEW DOCUMENT FOR GOING TO EUROPE

Starting in 2025, Europe-bound American citizens must apply for an ETIAS travel authorization prior to entering 30 European countries, including France and Italy. The authorization is valid for up to three years or until your passport expires. Learn more at travel-europe.europa.eu/etias.

How fast can you get it?

Your online form typically gets approved in just a few minutes, though it can take four days or more. It costs 7 euros but is free for those over age 70 or under 18.

ILLUSTRATION: JASON SCHNEIDER

GLOBAL ENTRY

When you return from a trip abroad, a Global Entry pass lets you zip through U.S. customs and immigration. You can apply at ttp.dhs.gov. It costs $100 for five years (but will rise to $120 on Oct. 1) and requires an in-person interview.

How fast can you get it?

Not so fast: The process can take up to 11 months–and there is no way to expedite it. You can renew your membership up to one year prior to your expiration date. Doing so lets you keep using it up to 24 months after its expiration.

INTERNATIONAL DRIVING PERMIT

Your state driver's license is valid when driving in Canada and Mexico, but to rent a car in other countries you may need to obtain an International Driving Permit (IDP), such as one from AAA.

How fast can you get it?

Filling out an application at aaa.com/vacation/idpf.html takes a few minutes. Bring the printout to a AAA office to get an IDP the same day, or mail it in, which can take a few weeks. Both methods cost $20. You can obtain an IDP up to six months ahead of travel.

A TOURIST VISA

Many countries, such as Australia and India, require visas for American travelers even for short-term stays. You may be able to obtain these online. Some are free, while others have a fee. For more information on your destination, go to travel.state.gov.

How fast can you get it?

It varies by destination. For example, the Australian government will typically approve an online tourist visa immediately after you submit it. Others, like India, can take up to 72 hours. Check the timing before you book your travel.

What About Clear?

Similar to TSA PreCheck, this membership promises to save you time in airport security lines–but only when departing from certain U.S. airports, and very few airports abroad. So it may not save you much time during international travel.

How fast can you get it?

Applying at clearme.com takes about 5 minutes, then it takes a few more minutes in person at a Clear airport kiosk to scan your biometrics. It costs $189 per year.

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

Cordless Drills

If you've had the same tired drill sitting in your toolbox for more than 10 years, now is a great time to replace it with a new model. (Even more so if your old one has a cord.) In the past decade, cordless drills have become more powerful, lighter, and more efficient, thanks to more powerful motors and advancements in lithium-ion battery technology.

Here, our experts have curated a list of the best battery-powered models we've tested this year, organized by the size of the jobs they can tackle.

EXPERT TIP If you already own other battery-powered tools, buy a drill made by the same brand because the batteries and chargers they use are often interchangeable. You'll pay about one-third less if you buy only the tool, without the battery and charger.

GENERAL-USE DRILLS

These make quick work of most home tasks, like hanging a shelf or tightening screws. They can be half the weight of heavy-duty models (at right), making them easier to handle.

83 OVERALL SCORE

Milwaukee 3403-22 $170 *(shown above)*

- 4/5 SPEED
- 5/5 POWER
- 5/5 RUN TIME
- 4/5 CHARGE TIME

75 OVERALL SCORE

Skil DL529002 $80

- 4/5 SPEED
- 5/5 POWER
- 3/5 RUN TIME
- 5/5 CHARGE TIME

72 OVERALL SCORE

DeWalt DCD703F1 $200

- 4/5 SPEED
- 5/5 POWER
- 3/5 RUN TIME
- 4/5 CHARGE TIME

71 OVERALL SCORE

Makita FD07R1 $200

- 4/5 SPEED
- 5/5 POWER
- 3/5 RUN TIME
- 4/5 CHARGE TIME

71 OVERALL SCORE

DeWalt DCD701F2 $150

- 4/5 SPEED
- 5/5 POWER
- 3/5 RUN TIME
- 4/5 CHARGE TIME

HEAVY-DUTY DRILLS

Many of these drills weigh 4 to 5 pounds, so they're tiring to hold for a long time. But they're also best for tackling big tasks, like building a deck.

87 OVERALL SCORE

Makita GFD02D $420

- 5/5 SPEED
- 4/5 POWER
- 5/5 RUN TIME
- 5/5 CHARGE TIME

87 OVERALL SCORE

Makita XFD16T $354

- 5/5 SPEED
- 5/5 POWER
- 5/5 RUN TIME
- 4/5 CHARGE TIME

87 OVERALL SCORE

Flex FX1171T-2B $229

- 5/5 SPEED
- 5/5 POWER
- 5/5 RUN TIME
- 4/5 CHARGE TIME

85 OVERALL SCORE

DeWalt DCD991P2 $320

- 5/5 SPEED
- 5/5 POWER
- 5/5 RUN TIME
- 4/5 CHARGE TIME

82 OVERALL SCORE

Kobalt (Lowe's) KXDD 1424A-03 $170

- 5/5 SPEED
- 5/5 POWER
- 5/5 RUN TIME
- 2/5 CHARGE TIME

TOP PHOTO: GREGORY REID; PROP STYLING BY MEGUMI EMOTO. OTHER PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY

RECALLS

TO STAY INFORMED ABOUT RECALLS FOR YOUR VEHICLES, READERS WITH MEMBERSHIP CAN USE OUR FREE CAR RECALL TRACKER AT **CR.ORG/MORE**.

HONDA RIDGELINE PICKUP TRUCKS

Honda is recalling 187,290 2020-2024 Ridgeline pickup trucks because of a potential problem with the wiring harness in the tailgate. Road salt and water could damage the tailgate. If this happens, repeated opening and closing of the tailgate could cause the harness to break over time, and the backup camera image would no longer display.
What to do: Dealers will replace the backup camera tailgate harness with an improved part that has more durable wiring. Owners can call Honda at 888-234-2138. The NHTSA campaign number for this recall is 24V-321, and Honda's recall number is Y17.

JOHNSON HEALTH TECH NORTH AMERICA TREADMILLS

In January 2022 Johnson Health Tech North America recalled about 19,900 treadmills. Now the company is recalling an additional 9,700 treadmills because the power cord can come loose from the power socket, posing a fire risk. They were sold at Johnson Health Tech North America and Johnson Fitness & Wellness stores nationwide from March 2018 through January 2024 for $3,400 to $8,900.
What to do: Inspect the treadmill to see whether there is a power cord bracket installed. If the bracket is not there, ensure that the power cord is completely inserted into the power socket on the treadmill prior to each use until the bracket is installed. Call 866-218-3674 or go to matrixfitness.com for details.

BLACK+DECKER GARMENT STEAMERS

In November 2022 Empower Brands recalled about 518,500 Black+Decker garment steamers. Now the company is recalling an additional 1.6 million steamers because they can expel, spray, or leak hot water during use, posing a burn hazard. The steamers were sold at Bed Bath & Beyond, Target, Walmart, and other stores nationwide and online at Amazon, bedbathbeyond.com, blackanddeckerappliances.com, and other websites from June 2021 through February 2023 for $14 to $23.
What to do: Stop using the steamer. Call Empower Brands at 800-990-5298 for details and instructions on how to receive a refund. If you received a replacement part as a result of the November 2022 recall, you are still eligible for a full refund.

DR POWER LEAF VACUUMS AND LEAF BLOWERS

DR Power is recalling about 57,200 tow-behind and walk-behind leaf vacuums as well as walk-behind leaf blowers because pieces can come loose and be ejected, posing a laceration hazard. They were sold at independent power equipment stores nationwide and online at drpower.com from September 2014 through January 2024 for $1,300 to $4,000.
What to do: Stop using the leaf vacuums and leaf blowers. Call DR Power at 877-221-4038 or go to drpower.com/recalls for details and for a free dealer-installed repair.

PROJECT WATSON EYELID WIPES FOR DOGS

Bausch + Lomb is recalling about 32,000 dog eyelid wipes because bacteria and fungi can grow in the container, posing a risk of infection in people and/or pets. The wipes were sold at PetSmart, Walmart, and other stores nationwide and online at Amazon and chewy.com from February 2023 through March 2024 for $13 to $15.
What to do: Stop using the wipes. Call 877-857-1149 or go to tryprojectwatson.com for details and instructions on how to receive a refund. You must sign and date the container and upload a photo at eyelidwiperecall.com.

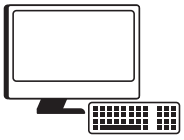
ZLINE WALL OVENS

Zline is recalling about 5,000 single- and double-door built-in electric wall ovens because the door hinge can dislodge, releasing the spring, which can damage or break through the door trim, posing an injury risk. The ovens were sold at Best Buy, Home Depot, Lowe's, and The Range Hood Store and online at costco.com, wayfair.com, and other online sellers from December 2020 through September 2022 for $1,900 to $3,950.
What to do: Stop using the oven. Call 833-256-3603, email awrecall@zlinekitchen.com, or go to zlinekitchen.com for instructions and to get a free replacement door and arrange for a service visit if you need help replacing the door.

PHOTO: CPSC (LEAF BLOWER). ICONS: RODRIGO DAMATI

AUGUST IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...

COMPUTERS



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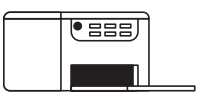

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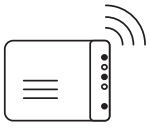


PRODUCT UPDATE

THE LATEST RATINGS FROM OUR LABS

Top Air Fryers From Our Tests

The newest models are bigger, better, and easier than ever to use. Here's how to choose the right one for your kitchen.

by Molly Bradley

▲ **MOST VERSATILE SETTINGS**

✓ **Instant Vortex Plus 140-3089-01** $130

79 OVERALL SCORE

▲ **AMPLE CAPACITY WITH A LARGE WINDOW**

✓ **Kenmore KKAF8Q** $120

72 OVERALL SCORE

◀ **TOP-RATED (FOR A NICE PRICE)**

$ **Dash Tasti-Crisp DCAF260** $60

81 OVERALL SCORE

PHOTOGRAPH BY GREGORY REID

HOME COOKS love air fryers, and for good reason: You can fry food to crispy perfection with little to no oil, cook a full meal in a matter of minutes, and reheat leftovers without compromising the texture. Their popularity has only grown since the first models were introduced in 2010, and it's led to more choices and a broader range of features and functions. Even other appliances, like toaster ovens and microwaves, have begun incorporating an "air fryer" setting to mimic what air fryers do.

Our love of air fryers hasn't only driven innovation in the appliances themselves. According to a 2023 report from Mintel, a market research agency, it's also led to more food products specifically designed to be cooked in air fryers. Now there are Perdue's Air Fryer Ready Crispy Wings and Urban Accents by Stonewall Kitchen's Air Fryer Hot & Spicy Cauliflower. Plus, many frozen and refrigerated foods–from pizza bites to egg rolls–include instructions for preparing them in an air fryer.

So if you've enjoyed your first-generation air fryer and want to upgrade, now may be the time to go for it. And if you've never owned or used one, you may be surprised by what they can do–and for a great price, too.

Best New Features

Air fryers aren't the only appliances that can get food hot fast; microwaves and toaster ovens do this, too. But only air fryers deliver crispiness while retaining a moist interior, whether you're starting with raw ingredients, cooking frozen fare, or reviving leftovers. New models make getting great results simpler than ever. Here are a few improvements you'll find.

THEY'RE MORE VERSATILE You may have thought of using an air fryer as just a fast way to crisp up some fries, and it's true, they're great for that. But new designs help you do much more. Some models, such as the Instant Vortex Plus (on the facing page), are also available in a version that comes with two cooking baskets. Others have a divider to split the basket as needed, ideal for prepping two items with different cooking times or food that needs to be flipped or shaken at different intervals (potatoes in one, broccoli in the other, for example).

You'll also find air fryers that come with a range of accessories, including skewer racks, pizza pans, and even a small rotisserie spit for chicken. (The Fritaire shown on page 20 has one.)

Some come with a tray that can be placed in the air-fryer basket. These are great for food that you need to flip individually–salmon fillets, chicken breasts, sandwiches–or that shouldn't be stacked, like anything coated with a batter.

THEY'RE EASIER TO USE Most models include settings for baking, roasting, warming, and reheating. Some offer additional specialized choices, say, for dehydrating, toasting, and even proofing dough. You'll also find air fryers with a range of programmed options, so you

5 SURPRISING THINGS YOU CAN MAKE IN YOUR AIR FRYER

Cakes, muffins, and brownies: Using small cake pans, muffin tins, and rimmed sheet pans that fit inside your air fryer, you can bake sweet treats with perfectly moist interiors without the long preheating time of an oven. The tops of your baked goods may brown more quickly in an air fryer, so cover them with aluminum foil.

Grilled cheese: The hot enclosed space of an air fryer can melt the cheese in the same time it takes to toast the bread to perfection, whereas in a pan on a stovetop, the bread is prone to browning too quickly. Spread a light layer of butter or mayonnaise on the outside of the bread and allow the sandwich to cook for a few minutes on each side.

Lobster tails: Meredith Laurence, author of "Air Fry Genius," says she air-fries lobster tails with great results. "Because the air fryer cooks food faster," she says, "the lobster doesn't have time to dry out." Chef secret: Add a little liquid to the bottom of the pan to ensure tender results.

Puff pastry: It turns out best when the cold dough hits a very hot oven—about 425° F—and starts baking immediately. So the intense heat of an air fryer is ideal for croissants and small tarts.

Dried fruit and herbs: Use the Dehydrate setting if your model has one or set the temperature to about 140° F. Allow 3 or 4 hours to dry fruit or 1 to 2 hours for herbs. Pro tip: Turn the fan speed down when drying herbs to keep them from flying around inside the machine.

PHOTO, FACING PAGE: PROP STYLING BY MEGUMI EMOTO. PHOTO, THIS PAGE: NELEA REAZANTEVA/GETTY IMAGES. ICONS: ELIAS STEIN

can cook foods like fries, wings, bacon, vegetables, and more with the touch of a button. The Gourmia GAF686 Digital, $60, has 12 presets.

Some models (the Chefman AccuFry RJ38-SQPF-5T2P-W, $100, is one) have a glass pane so that you can check cooking without opening the door.

THEY LOOK BETTER You'll find sleeker styles in more finishes, good news if you plan to keep yours on the countertop all the time. The Beautiful by Drew Barrymore model at right, for instance, has a matte exterior, six color options, and gold handles.

THEY'RE LESS PRICEY Our highest-rated air fryer, the Dash Tasti-Crisp DCAF260, costs $60. Stacy Canova-Turner, CR's market analyst for air fryers, has seen models priced as low as $30—and as high as $500. "The price generally reflects the size [capacity] and the number of functions it comes with," she says. "Higher-priced models may also have a nonstick ceramic basket. On a lower-priced model, the nonstick material may be of inferior quality. And many of the budget models are mostly plastic with fewer accessories." That means that a less expensive model may not last quite as long, but you can still expect excellent performance.

What Air Fryers Still Can't Do

As good as they are, air fryers aren't the best way to cook certain foods—like those that require a very wet batter, for instance. "Loose tempura batters are troublesome," says Meredith Laurence, the author of "Air Fry Genius" (Walah, 2017), among other books. A thin batter will drip through any holes in the tray the food rests on, which means it won't crisp up around your food and will make a mess in your appliance. You can cook more thickly battered foods in an air fryer, Laurence says, like a beer-battered fish that's dredged in flour and crumbs to keep the batter in place. Just use a little bit of parchment paper under the food to avoid any dripping. (But don't fully cover the tray with parchment paper or a liner because that will block the airflow that's essential for crisping.)

Even roomy air fryers don't come close to the capacity of a conventional oven or a large toaster oven. You may be able to roast a small chicken and make Tater Tots for the whole family, but you won't be cooking a Thanksgiving turkey in there. If you want more room, a toaster oven with an air-fryer setting may be a better choice. It won't crisp up fries as well as a dedicated air fryer—see our fry-off on the facing page-but it does a good job of browning and roasting. For our top air fryer toaster ovens, see page 23.

DO-IT-ALL AIR FRYERS

76 OVERALL SCORE

SLEEK OUTSIDE, ROOMY INSIDE

✔ **Beautiful by Drew Barrymore 19089 Air Fryer** $140

73 OVERALL SCORE

RETRO LOOK—AND A ROTISSERIE

✔ **Fritaire 209031** $200

The Right Type for Your Kitchen

Here's what to consider as you select a new model.

CAPACITY Some of the air fryers in our ratings have baskets with a capacity of less than 5 quarts; others advertise that they hold well more than that. But we've found that capacity claims are sometimes inaccurate. We measure capacity and often find it's less than reported. See the measured capacity column in our ratings on pages 22 and 23 to guide your choice.

If there are only one or two people in your household, a smaller style may be just fine. This size works great for a couple of chicken breasts, salmon fillets, or hamburger patties, for instance, or sides for a few people.

If you want to make more ample amounts—or to cook an entire meal in an air fryer—choose a large-capacity model. These also allow you to roast a chicken or to bake cakes or muffins.

FOOTPRINT Planning to keep your air fryer out on the countertop? Before you buy, take the time to measure the spot where you want to place it, allowing at least 5 inches on all sides. Air fryers get very hot, especially in the back where the vent lets out hot air, so surrounding surfaces and the power cord or outlet behind it can get damaged if placed too close to the appliance. If you have cabinets above your countertop, remember to measure how much vertical space is available, allowing for 5 inches there, too.

If you'll store the air fryer in a cabinet when you're not using it, make sure you have enough room because even small-capacity models can be bulky. Air fryers can weigh nearly 20 pounds, so check that the shelf it will sit on can handle that weight—and make sure it won't be too heavy for you to lift up onto your countertop.

PHOTOS, THIS PAGE: MANUFACTURERS. PHOTO, FACING PAGE: PROP STYLING BY MEGUMI EMOTO

WHICH ONE MAKES THE BEST FRIES?

More toaster ovens now come with an air-fryer setting, providing potential competition for stand-alone air fryers. To find out if these toaster ovens deliver the crisp results you'd expect from an air fryer, a CR staffer pitted our top-rated air fryer toaster oven, the Breville The Smart Oven Air Fryer Pro, against one of our highly rated CR Recommended air fryers, the Gourmia GAF414. The challenge: To bring a batch of frozen fries, precoated in oil, to crisp perfection. Here's what we found.

GOURMIA GAF414 AIR FRYER $50

76 OVERALL SCORE

METHOD: 400° F for 12 minutes, shaken halfway through cooking.

RESULTS: The fries crisped up thoroughly and surprisingly evenly. In addition to the crisp exterior, each fry was tender inside, providing a nice contrast of textures. They remained firm, if not quite crisp, even after they cooled for 10 minutes.

BREVILLE THE SMART OVEN AIR FRYER PRO $400

70 OVERALL SCORE

METHOD: 400° F for 16 minutes on the air-fryer setting, turned halfway through cooking.

RESULTS: The fries got crispy but not very evenly. They browned quickly at the ends and edges. But even after 16 minutes of cooking, the midsection of each fry was still fairly soft and the fries were visibly oily. They turned even softer once they cooled for 10 minutes.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GREGORY REID

Ratings › **Happy Fry Day** The best air fryers in our tests are easy to use and clean—and they're not too loud. Toaster ovens with an air-fryer setting won't crisp quite as well, but they offer a versatile alternative.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results			Features								
			Controls	Noise	Cleaning	Measured capacity (qt.)	Claimed capacity	Recorded temp. when set to 350° F	Dimensions, HxWxD (in.)	Weight (lb.)	Claimed wattage	Digital display	Dishwasher-safe	Programmed settings
AIR FRYERS														
Dash Tasti-Crisp DCAF260	81	$60	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	1.9	2.6	340	11x9x11	6	1,000	●	●	
Gourmia GAF686 Digital	80	$60	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	4.3	6.0	365	14x11x14	9	1,500	●	●	●
Instant Vortex Plus 140-3079-01	79	$110	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	3.0	4.0	324	11x10x13	9	1,600	●	●	●
Chefman AccuFry RJ38-SQPF-5T2P-W	79	$100	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	4.5	5.0	322	13x11x14	7	1,300	●	●	●
Instant Vortex Plus 140-3089-01	79	$130	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	5.2	6.0	332	13x12x16	14	1,700	●	●	●
Pioneer Woman PW6136170192004	78	$80	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	6.7	6.3	332	14x13x16	12	1,700	●	●	●
Williams Sonoma Open Kitchen 60068	77	$100	!	⌃⌃	⌃	3.6	4.3	338	13x11x14	11	1,500	●	●	●
Beautiful by Drew Barrymore 19089	76	$140	⌃	!	⌃⌃	9.0	9.0	313	14x17x15	16	1,700	●	●	●
Gourmia GAF414	76	$50	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	2.8	4.0	349	12x10x14	9	1,300	●	●	●
T-Fal Easy Fry XXL EY705D51	76	$150	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	5.4	5.9	328	13x13x17	13	1,750	●		●
Cuisinart AIR-200	75	$150	⌃	⌃	⌃	4.9	6.0	331	13x12x17	12	1,800	●	●	●
Instant Vortex Slim 140-3100-01	75	$120	⌃	⌃	⌃	4.9	6.0	346	12x11x18	11	1,700	●	●	●
Sur La Table Kitchen Essentials 5 qt.	74	$80	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	4.4	5.0	347	11x9x16	10	1,500	●	●	●
GoWise USA GW22731	73	$80	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	!	4.9	5.8	334	14x12x15	12	1,700	●	●	●
Ovente FAD61302 Digital	73	$65	⌃	⌃	⌃	2.9	3.2	363	13x11x14	11	1,400	●	●	●
Bella Pro Series 90174	73	$50	⌃	⌃	⌃	3.4	4.2	349	12x10x13	8	1,500	●	●	●
Oster DiamondForce CKSTAFLC-DM	73	$80	⌃	⌃	⌃	3.6	5.0	323	13x12x15	12	1,700	●	●	●
Fritaire 209031	73	$200	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	4.7	5.0	329	12x14x11	11	1,500	●		●
Proctor Silex 35060	73	$80	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	4.9	5.5	324	14x15x13	10	1,700			●
Dash Express Tasti-Crisp DCAF120	72	$45	!	⌃⌃	⌃	1.9	2.6	348	11x9x11	6	1,000		●	
Kenmore KKAF8Q	72	$120	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	6.3	8.0	337	14x12x15	13	1,700	●	●	●
Dreo Pro DR-KAF002	72	$90	⌃	⌃	⌃	2.5	4.0	323	12x10x13	8	1,500	●	●	●
Beautiful by Drew Barrymore 19038	72	$70	⌃	⌃	⌃	4.0	6.0	333	13x12x15	11	1,750	●	●	
Philips Essential XL HD9270/91	71	$120	⌃	⌃	⌃	3.6	6.6	339	12x13x16	13	1,700	●	●	●
Elite Gourmet EAF5317D	70	$60	⌃	⌃	⌃	3.8	5.3	334	13x11x13	8	1,350	●	●	●
Bella Pro Series Slim 90190	70	$70	!	⌃	⌃⌃	3.7	4.0	346	11x8x15	7	1,300	●	●	●
PowerXL Vortex PAF-7QB	70	$140	⌃⌃	⌃	!	5.7	7.0	330	14x12x16	12	1,700	●		●
Crux Marshmello 17501	69	$80	⌃	⌃	⌃	7.2	8.0	335	13x13x15	10	1,750	●	●	●
Kalorik Vivid FT52333SS	69	$150	⌃	⌃	⌃	5.4	7.0	331	13x12x16	12	1,500	●	●	●
Crux Marshmello 17499	69	$50	⌃	!	⌃	3.0	3.0	333	11x9x12	6	1,300	●	●	●

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results			Features								
			Controls	Noise	Cleaning	Measured capacity (qt.)	Claimed capacity	Recorded temp. when set to 350° F	Dimensions, HxWxD (in.)	Weight (lb.)	Claimed wattage	Digital display	Dishwasher-safe	Programmed settings
AIR FRYERS *Continued*														
Dash Deluxe DFAF455GB	69	$100	⌃	⌃	I	5.6	6.0	355	14x13x15	12	1,700		●	
West Bend AFWB7QBK13	69	$80	I	⌃	⌃⌃	6.1	7.0	315	13x12x15	11	1,700	●	●	●
Salton AF2103	68	$120	I	⌃	⌃⌃	6.6	8.5	315	14x13x15	12	1,700	●	●	●
Ninja Foodi DZ550	68	$250	⌃	I	⌃	7.4	10.0	365	13x17x15	19	1,690	●	●	●
Instant Vortex Plus 140-3118-01	68	$180	⌃	I	⌃	6.1	8.0	339	13x16x15	18	1,700	●	●	●
Ninja Foodi 2-Basket DZ201	68	$200	⌃	I	⌃	6.0	8.0	336	12x16x14	18	1,690	●	●	●
National NA-3001AF	68	$55	I	⌃	⌃	1.7	2.1	315	11x9x11	5	1,000		●	
Saki Smart HF-8350DT	67	$80	⌃	I	⌃⌃	3.4	4.7	315	12x10x14	8	1,500	●	●	●
Ninja Foodi FlexBasket DZ071	67	$180	⌃	I	⌃	4.9	7.0	341	11x18x12	17	1,690	●	●	●
Aria CCT-887	67	$70	⌄	⌃⌃	⌃	2.0	3.0	335	13x10x13	7	1,000		●	
CruxGG 6 qt. Touchscreen	67	$80	⌃	I	⌃	5.0	6.0	369	13x11x14	10	1,500	●	●	●

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results								Features		
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Reheat	Baking	Color range	Toasting time	Full batch	One slice	Ease of cleaning	Ease of use	Convection oven	Temperature range	Interior dimensions, HxWxD (in.)
TOASTER OVENS WITH AN AIR-FRYER SETTING															
✓ **Breville** The Smart Oven Air Fryer Pro BOV900BSSUSC	70	$400	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	I	⌃	⌃	⌄	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	●	80-480° F	7x16x12
✓ **Ninja** DCT401	70	$250	–	–	I	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	●	100-450° F	Upper:3x13x12 Lower: 5x13x12
✓ **Breville** The Joule Oven Air Fryer Pro BOV950BST1BUS1	68	$550	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	I	I	⌃	⌄	⌃	I	⌃	⌃⌃	●	80-480° F	7x16x12
✓ **Hamilton Beach** Sure-Crisp 31193	67	$100	⌃	⌄	I	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	I	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	I		170-450° F	7x12x11
✓ **KitchenAid** KCO255BM	66	$280	⌃	I	I	⌃	⌃⌃	⌄	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	●	80-450° F	6x15x11
✓ **Breville** The Smart Oven Air Fryer BOV860BSS1BUS1	65	$350	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	I	⌃	I	I	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	●	120-450° F	6x14x11

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/airfryers and CR.org/toasterovenratings.

HOW WE TEST: For air fryers, the **Overall Score** is based on performance in all our tests. **Controls** refers to their legibility and ease of setting. **Noise** is measured with the appliance in operation. **Cleaning** relates to ease of washing interior and exterior surfaces.

For toaster ovens, the **Overall Score** combines performance test results with survey data for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction. **Predicted reliability** estimates how likely a brand's newly bought model will have problems in the first four years. **Owner satisfaction** reflects the proportion of CR members extremely likely to recommend their toaster oven brand. A gray dash (–) indicates insufficient data. For the **reheat** test, we use lasagna; for **baking,** muffins and cookies. **Color range** is the ability to make very light to very dark toast. **Toasting time** reflects time needed to toast the maximum number of slices. **Full batch** reflects color evenness. The **one-slice** test aims for medium-brown. We also assess food traps **(ease of cleaning)** and controls **(ease of use).**

THE DANGER IN YOUR

What's floating in your home's air could be harmful to your health.

WHEN A SUNBEAM HITS JUST RIGHT, you see them: tiny particles of dust suspended in the air. They look innocuous—until you stop to think about their tendency to collect on surfaces throughout your house.

If you take a close look at those specks, you may spot skin, hair, and dander, says Gabriel Filippelli, PhD, executive director of the Indiana University Environmental Resilience Institute in Bloomington. Look closer still, with an electron microscope or a chemical analysis, and more unsettling things reveal themselves: lead paint and other heavy metal fragments, microbes, fungi, mold, mites, microplastics, per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), and even toxins in some pesticides, says Filippelli, who helps run a project analyzing the dust captured by people's vacuums.

Because these substances are in the dust all around us, they end up in us, too. The chemicals in the dust on our hands can get into our food and be absorbed into our bodies through our skin. Kids ingest dust as they move around close to the ground. And we all

Here's how to keep your place clean—and safe.

inhale it, says Elizabeth Matsui, PhD, who researches indoor air pollution at the University of Texas at Austin's Dell Medical School.

All this exposure has consequences. In the short term, dust can cause lung irritation, allergies, and asthma. Longer term, some chemicals in it are linked to diabetes, various cancers, reproductive problems, and other serious health problems.

While humans have been exposed to dust for as long as we've existed, many of the harmful chemicals found in today's household dust are byproducts of our very modern world. And that helps explain why an age-old problem—cleaning dusty surfaces—is worth taking on with a new urgency.

Thankfully, unlike some environmental health problems that seem beyond our control, you can actually clean up the dust in your home. You just need the right tools.

BY KEVIN LORIA, JOANNE CHEN, TANYA CHRISTIAN, MARY FARRELL, DEB SILBER, AND DAN WROCLAWSKI

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY LISA SHEEHAN

WHAT'S IN YOUR DUST?

You've probably noticed that no matter how many times you clean a shelf or floor, dust turns up yet again, even in areas that have been barely used. It begs the question: Where does it all come from?

About half of your household dust comes from inside your own home, Filippelli says, primarily from cooking, pets, people, and consumer products. The rest is tracked, carried, or blown into our homes from outside.

Chemical analyses find that dust can contain a veritable catalog of toxic byproducts from nature and industry, says Tasha Stoiber, PhD, a senior scientist with the Environmental Working Group.

That includes PFAS from carpets and other products coated with the chemicals to make them stain- and water-resistant, as well as flame retardants like PBDE from electronics and furniture. Other chemicals of concern are phthalates and bisphenol A (BPA) from the plastic throughout our homes, volatile organic compounds that off-gas from furniture or paints, and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, which are byproducts of burning formed by cooking, smoking, or wildfires.

How Tiny Specks Can Harm You

It's hard to document exactly how exposure to the range of chemicals in dust affects health, says Andrea Gore, PhD, a professor of pharmacology and toxicology at the University of Texas at Austin. But, she says, over time exposure to some of the hazardous compounds in dust has been linked to "complex, age-related problems" such as diabetes and Parkinson's disease.

Lead and other heavy metals can have particularly pernicious effects on children, causing neurological damage and contributing to learning and behavioral disorders. Certain PFAS have been connected to some cancers, diminished immune function, thyroid problems, and liver disease. Phthalates are linked to reproductive problems. Microplastics and nanoplastics that are consumed or inhaled are associated with cardiovascular problems, inflammatory bowel disease, and other potential health risks. Flame retardants may affect development in children and have been linked to reproductive issues and increased cancer risk.

Ingested dust particles can lead to chemicals being absorbed through the gut, where they can get absorbed into our body tissue, Matsui says. The tiniest particles, which are associated with cardiovascular disease, can go deep into the lungs and cross into the bloodstream. Any inhaled particles can

How Big Is Your Problem?

One way to get a sense of what's floating in your home's air is by using an air quality monitor. These usually detect pollutants such as carbon dioxide and volatile organic compounds. But some can also measure particulates—aka dust.

To find a monitor that detects dust, look for one labeled PM2.5 or PM10. That means it can identify particles that are 2.5 or 10 micrometers in diameter, respectively. Two such monitors that do well in CR's tests are shown below. For best results, place the monitor where you're most concerned about air quality. And consider buying multiple monitors to put in rooms that you use heavily, such as your bedroom, kitchen, and home office.

AIR MONITORS

78 OVERALL SCORE

Temtop Air Quality Monitor M100-US
$230

75 OVERALL SCORE

Inkbird 6 in 1 Indoor Air Quality Monitor PTH-9A
$90

PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS

also trigger breathing problems like asthma in people of any age. Indeed, air pollution–including not only the contaminants we are exposed to while outdoors but also those that are in our homes–is linked to millions of deaths worldwide each year.

Where you live matters, too. People exposed to more dust and more pollution both indoors and out face a higher risk of health problems, Matsui says. So dust and indoor air pollution are a particular concern for people who live where wildfires are common, as well as those exposed to industrial pollution.

In the U.S., those effects are often felt most acutely in low-income and marginalized communities both because of their proximity to sources of outdoor air pollution and because their housing is likely to have worse air circulation due to a lack of central air conditioning and other factors, according to a National Academies of Science report that Matsui co-produced.

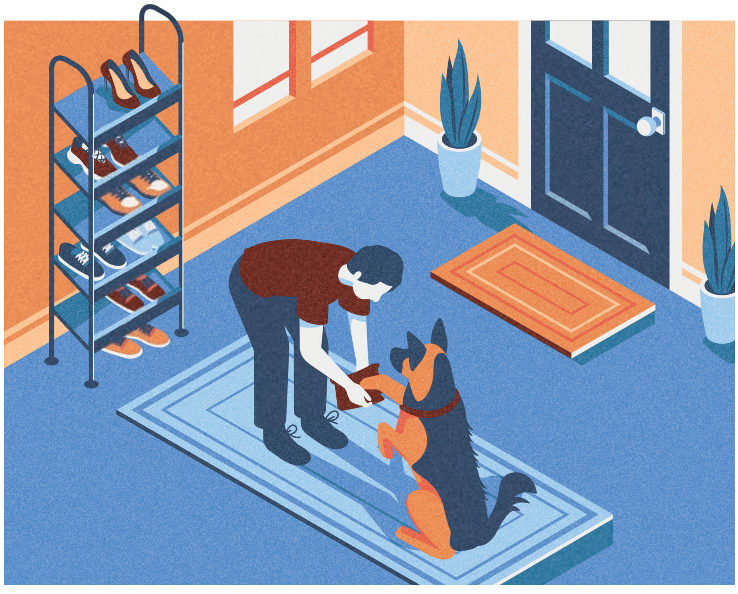
Though the quality of the air where you live may be out of your control, you can reduce the risks posed by dust in your home with some planning and smart choices. For example, the EWG's Stoiber and colleagues found that after a California law went into effect limiting the use of flame retardant chemicals in furniture, households that switched to furniture that was compliant with the new law saw flame retardant levels in their dust go down. After six months, concentrations of some types of flame retardants fell by roughly 50 percent.

Other steps that can help reduce dust in your home include becoming a shoes-off household, strategically using dehumidifiers and air purifiers, and choosing the right vacuum cleaner and other tools to rein in dust.

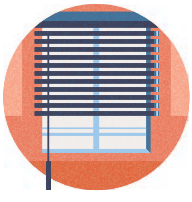
The combined effect of many small steps can yield substantial health benefits, according to the report from the National Academies of Science.

How Dust Gets In

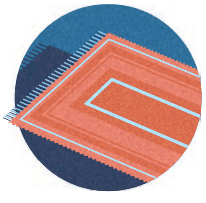
Sealing off the points where dust enters your house and minimizing spaces where it settles can make cleanup much easier.



Keep dirty shoes (and paws) out. Get a doormat, and scrape off debris from shoes. Put shoes in a closet or on a shoe rack near the door, and clean your dog's paws with soft cleaning wipes or a gentle brush before it enters your home.



Swap out curtains for shades. Fabric, particularly the high-texture sort, invites dust. If you can't part with your curtains, vacuum them every week and wash them once a season.



Rethink your rug decor. Rugs trap dust, and the bigger the rug, the bigger the problem. So opt for area rugs over carpets and choose low- or no-pile designs. Or stick with bare floors.

Put mattresses and pillows in dust-mite-proof covers. These barriers help prevent infestations with the allergens, which can thrive in and on your bed.

Be window smart. Whether to open your windows depends on where you live and changing outdoor conditions. If you live in an area with air pollution from wildfires, traffic, or other sources, keeping windows closed makes sense. In other cases, opening windows on nice days can help clear the air.

Consider bookcases with doors. That can reduce your dusting and keep clutter—also a big dust collector—out of sight.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GUILHERME HENRIQUE

CR'S GUIDE TO DUST CONTROL

Even if you take the precautions listed earlier to keep dust out of your living space, some will still get in. When it does, your goal is to limit its spread in the air. Then, when the dust settles, we have the best methods and tools for whisking it away.

In Your Air

Air Purifiers

These devices draw in air that's in your home, trap pollutants with filters that are in the devices, then send clean air back out. HEPA filters, the most common type found in air purifiers, are designed to capture at least 99.97 percent of particles 0.3 micrometer in diameter–the size of many dust particles.

WHERE TO USE THEM: Air purifiers should be placed in the rooms where you spend the most time, and close to things–such as a fireplace, a wood stove, or your pet's favorite resting place–that may create a lot of dust.

They work best when they're run 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. That constant cleaning reduces particulate matter (aka dust) before it reaches your floor. But because the devices are on all the time, you'll want ones that do a great job cleaning your air without making a racket. Place them at least 6 inches from any wall or large piece of furniture to allow for good airflow.

KEEPING THEM CLEAN: For the devices to work well, air purifier filters need to be regularly cleaned or changed. Many of the devices have a light indicating when the filter needs to be replaced. For those without the light, check the filter every three months and change or clean it when it looks dirty. They also often come with a prefilter, such as a mesh fabric on the outside of the device. So make sure you follow instructions for keeping that clean, too.

New filters, especially HEPA filters, can be pricey, with some costing up to $200. Factor in those costs when choosing an air purifier. To help in that effort, CR's ratings factor in information about the cost of filter replacements.

PRO TIP: Keep your air purifier on auto mode. That limits noise, reduces energy consumption, and ensures that the air quality in your room is optimal.

HVAC Air Filters

If your house has an HVAC heating and cooling system, it has a filter that protects the equipment from damage and improves indoor air quality. Basic

PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS; MANUFACTURERS

BEST AIR PURIFIERS

Models suitable for big rooms can also work in smaller ones, at a lower speed, which can be quieter. For full ratings, go to **CR.org/airpurifiers**.

SMALL ROOM
GermGuardian CDAP4500BCA
$90
85 OVERALL SCORE

MEDIUM ROOM
Samsung Bluesky AX26BG3100GG/AA
$328
79 OVERALL SCORE

LARGE ROOM
Blueair Blue Pure 211i Max
$349
82 OVERALL SCORE

EXTRA-LARGE ROOM
Coway Airmega ProX 3522F
$763
85 OVERALL SCORE

BEST AIR FILTERS

Here are two top-rated HVAC air filters. For complete ratings, go to **CR.org/airfilters**.

models are made from strands of fiberglass or metal mesh and capture large particles. Higher-end filters are pleated and can capture particles as tiny as bacteria.

Their performance is reflected in something called their MERV rating, which ranges from 1 to 16. Filters with a MERV of 8 can capture pollen, mold spores, and many types of household dust. At MERV 13—the highest rating you'll find for most of the popular residential HVAC filter sizes—you can count on the filter to trap bacteria, smoke, and other microscopic particles. They can cost $40 or more.

WHERE TO USE THEM: These air filters belong in your HVAC system's return air duct. Because these systems work in a loop—drawing in air through your home's return vents and then releasing warm or cool air through supply ducts and vents—dust and dirt are bound to get caught up in the continuous circuit.

HOW TO MAINTAIN THEM: Most HVAC filters need to be replaced once per season (roughly every three months), says Misha Kollontai, who manages CR's air filter testing. But some can last as long as 12 months, depending on the model. Replace them more often if you have a pet, live in an area of the country that's prone to wildfire smoke, or suffer from allergies or asthma. Replacing the filter is a simple job that typically involves slipping out the old one and sliding in a new one. If you are unsure how to do this, ask the person who services your home heating or cooling system to show you during their next visit.

PRO TIP: "We find that thicker filters have two big advantages," Kollontai says. "They filter particles out of the air better and require replacement less often." But not every HVAC system can accommodate a thicker filter—the most common size is 1-inch thick—though you can retrofit the ductwork of some systems to accept one that is thicker.

Dehumidifiers

Keeping your home at a relatively low humidity level—below 50 percent—can limit the spread of dust mites and the allergens they produce. A dehumidifier can help you do that.

WHERE TO USE IT: Running a dehumidifier in the basement may help reduce humidity in the whole house, says M. Bilal Khalid, MD, a Delaware allergist and clinical immunologist. He says keeping indoor humidity levels below 50 percent may be especially helpful to people who are allergic to dust mites. These pests thrive on moisture and human skin cells, and make their homes in bedding, upholstery, carpets, and other soft surfaces. "When all three are present, they grow exponentially," Khalid says.

Choose a dehumidifier that's big enough to handle the space you want to keep dry, opting for a larger one if the area is typically damp. Wherever you place it, make sure your dehumidifier is at least a foot from walls and furniture so that air can freely flow in and out (note that some dehumidifiers vent on the top, others on the side).

HOW TO MAINTAIN IT: Check the dehumidifier's indicator lights to know when it's time to clean the filter and, if the device isn't hooked up to a hose and drain, empty the water tank.

PRO TIP: Check our ratings for a dehumidifier with an accurate humidistat. That's a control that turns the device off when it reaches a set humidity, and back on when humidity levels go back up again.

1-INCH
Filtrete MPR 1900 Filter
$23

68 OVERALL SCORE

4-INCH
Aprilaire Healthy Home 213 MERV 13
$57

75 OVERALL SCORE

BEST DEHUMIDIFIERS

These top dehumidifiers have different-sized capacities. For full ratings, go to **CR.org/dehumidifiers**.

SMALL CAPACITY
Midea MAD20S1QWT Dehumidifier
$220

87 OVERALL SCORE

MEDIUM CAPACITY
Midea MAD35S1QWT Dehumidifier
$245

92 OVERALL SCORE

LARGE CAPACITY
Honeywell TP70WKNR
$360

83 OVERALL SCORE

On Surfaces

Cleaning Cloths

For routine dusting, a cotton rag moistened with water works well and is a cheap and environmentally friendly option, says Stephen Sharp, vice president of fiber innovation and strategic facilities at Gaston College's Textile Technology Center in Belmont, N.C.

Dust adheres more easily to a slightly damp cloth than to a dry one, and the water makes the cloth more pliable–the better to get into any nicks and grooves, like on a wood bench, says Rachel O'Brien, PhD, assistant professor of civil and environmental engineering at the University of Michigan. When you're done, rinse out the debris and throw the cloth into the wash to use again.

To kick it up a notch, consider a damp microfiber cloth. It provides lots of surface area for dust to stick to. Use a dry, not damp, microfiber cloth on electronics and screens–it will scratch less and reduce smudging. Wash, as directed, to reuse.

Polypropylene sheets (like Swiffer wipes) have randomly arranged fibers that can provide an electrostatic charge, which allows them to hang onto dust a bit better. However, they're relatively pricey and aren't reusable.

HOW OFTEN TO USE THEM: Dust easy-to-reach spots every week or two, and more often if you have small kids or pets. For areas that require a stepladder, like the tops of bookshelves, dust once a month.

PRO TIP: Fold your cloth in half and then in half again so that you have eight clean surfaces on each cloth to work through.

Dusters

Irregularly shaped objects require a duster. It should have a fluffy head so that you can attack multiple surfaces at once (such as a plant or trophy) and catch particles that get knocked off as you dust (think a chandelier). It should have a flexible handle so that you can skim along curved objects (like vases or lamps) and squeeze into tight spots (say, between picture frames). Dusters with microfiber or polypropylene heads work best; those made with feathers are delicate and hard to clean, while lambswool dusters don't hang on to dust as well.

HOW OFTEN TO USE THEM: Break out the duster as frequently as you've been using a dustcloth–weekly or biweekly for objects within reach, like your window A/C vents; monthly for less accessible surfaces, like ceiling fans.

PRO TIP: In each room, dust from top to bottom and work from edge to edge. That way, "you get over three chances to catch every last dust bunny, as the stray particle that fell off your ceiling fan can land on the counter, and if you miss it when you wipe the counter, it falls to the floor, where you vacuum and mop last," says Melissa Homer, a consultant for the residential cleaning service Ecomaids, headquartered in Holmdel, N.J.

A Swiffer Microfiber Duster Starter Kit costs around $8 for five sheets and a handle. To save money, avoid waste, and get better results, start with the cleanest room and end with the bathroom, says Maria Striemer, a senior manager of global scientific communications at Procter & Gamble, maker of Swiffer products. That keeps you from introducing new debris into a cleaner room.

Do You Really Need Furniture Spray?

FORTY-FIVE PERCENT of Americans use a dust spray or furniture polish, according to a 2024 nationally representative CR survey of 2,042 adults. On hard surfaces, a spray or polish can help pick up dust while leaving a shine behind. But a slightly damp cloth (followed, on wood, with a swipe with a dry one) does a good job. Plus, ingredients in some products may pose health or environmental concerns, so you may prefer to play it safe and avoid them, says Christopher M. Reddy, PhD, who studies sustainable products at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts.

For a product with fewer concerning ingredients, consider one certified by Made Safe, an organization that screens household products (see right). Or try this DIY recipe: Mix ½ cup of lemon juice with a few drops of olive oil in a bottle, spray, then wipe with a cloth.

Meliora All-Purpose Home Cleaner, $10, and **Pure Natural Multi-Purpose Cleaner Free & Clear,** $20.

PHOTO: MADE SAFE

6 PLACES WHERE DUST CAN HIDE

"The most frustrating thing about dust is just how pervasive it actually is," says home-care expert Melissa Homer, whose career includes 18 years developing cleaning procedures for the residential cleaning service MaidPro. Here's where to scout for dust.

In High Places

Think the tops of doors, windows, bookshelves, and picture frames.
TO CLEAN: Use a microfiber towel dampened with water or an all-purpose cleaner. If you can't reach, use a duster on an extension pole.

On Drapes

Also on upholstered furniture.
TO CLEAN: Use your vacuum hose, adjusting the suction to avoid damaging delicate items like lampshades.

Under Furniture

That includes below the bed or couch, behind the toilet, and in the backs of closets.
TO CLEAN: Use a wet/dry microfiber mop or an extendable duster.

Under Range Hoods

Steam and vaporized oil make dust stick there, and to kitchen cabinets and fans.
TO CLEAN: Spray with a degreaser approved for the surface, then wipe. For fans, spray an extendable duster with an all-purpose cleaner, bend into a C shape, and draw over each blade.

On Blinds and Air Vents

Dust loves to hide in the slats.
TO CLEAN: Close slats, wipe with a damp cloth, then reverse the slats and wipe again. If they're still dirty, wash gently in a bathtub of warm, soapy water.

Behind Appliances

Dust that gathers behind a refrigerator, washer, or dryer can interfere with its operation.
TO CLEAN: If you can't pull out the appliance, sneak a vacuum hose or a flexible duster, on a pole if needed, behind and under it.

Brooms and Mops

Vacuums work better, because sweeping can stir some dust back into the air. Still, brooms can be a quick way to pick up larger bits of food or other debris that attract dust or, over time, break into smaller specks. Soft bristles with "flagged" tips (they look like split ends) catch smaller particles best, says Steve Zelmanski, senior manager at industrial and safety supply company Grainger. An angled shape—where one side is longer than the other—lets you get into corners and crevices and beneath appliances.

If pet hair is an issue, Tonya Roark, co-owner of All Pro Cleaning in Missouri's Lake of the Ozarks area, suggests the Broombi (broombi.com). She uses that when she doesn't want to break out the vacuum. Instead of bristles, it has a washable electrostatic silicone edge that picks up hair and other debris without getting tangled.

Periodically follow up with a mop and sudsy water. Roark prefers spin mops with two-tank buckets, one for clean water and another for dirty. Two options: Tovar's Split Bucket Basic (tovarseasycleaning.com) and the O-Cedar EasyWring RinseClean (ocedar.com). Throw the mopheads into the washing machine to reuse.

HOW OFTEN TO USE THEM: Sweep as needed. Mop once a week, or more often if you have a small child or pets.

PRO TIP: Sweep your floor section by section, making a small pile for each area. By sweeping shorter distances, you lose fewer particles along the way. After sweeping, use a wet paper towel to wipe down the bristles, and periodically clean the broom with dish soap and water.

BEST VACUUMS

Here are upright, canister, and cordless stick vacuums that are great for dust control.

77 OVERALL SCORE

UPRIGHT

Kenmore Elite Pet Friendly 31150 $350

84 OVERALL SCORE

CANISTER

Miele Complete C3 Marin $1,300

77 OVERALL SCORE

CORDLESS STICK

Miele Triflex HX1 Facelift SMUL1 $600

Vacuums

Your key tool against dust is a vacuum, so you want one that gets top scores in CR's tests for cleaning carpets and bare floors, hose suction, and, especially, emissions. Vacuums that excel in that latter test, including all those shown in the ratings on the facing page, have tight seals and excellent filters to keep vacuumed-up debris from spewing back into the air. "If the entire system is not sealed, it doesn't matter how good the filters are," says Susan Booth, who oversees CR's vacuum testing. Bagged and bagless vacuums have gotten better at curbing emissions, but a bagged model eliminates the messy job of emptying the bin of a bagless model.

HOW OFTEN TO USE THEM: At least once a week, especially if you have an active family with people and pets coming and going, live on a dusty road, or have allergies.

WHERE TO USE THEM: Take advantage of attachments. Use the crevice tool to get at hard-to-reach places like high corners and behind furniture, and use brushes on upholstery, lampshades, window blinds, and curtains. Many vacuums come with suction control, which makes it easier to clean curtains or drapes. Most do this with a slider that diverts some of the hose's suctioning power, but high-end vacuums may have a dial for more accurate adjustments.

PRO TIP: When buying a vacuum, pay special attention to the bags and filters. "If you are very concerned about or sensitive to dust, get a model with HEPA bags or a HEPA filter," Booth says. HEPA filters remove at least 99.97 percent of dust, pollen, and other airborne particles. Regular vacuum bags and HEPA bags are typically interchangeable, but check your owner's manual to make sure. If you don't find dust particularly bothersome, you could do without the HEPA filters.

PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS; MANUFACTURERS

Ratings › **Dust-Busting Vacuums** All the vacuums below excel not only in picking up debris but also in our clean emissions test, key to preventing the vac from spewing dust back into the air.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results								Features		
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Carpet	Bare floors	Hose suction	Edges	Clean emissions	Handling	Pet hair	Noise	Weight (lb.)	Brush on/ off switch	Run time (min.)
BAGLESS UPRIGHT VACUUMS															
✓ **Shark** Stratos AZ3002	77	$500	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	NA	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	17		NA
✓ **Shark** Vertex DuoClean AZ2002	75	$480	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	NA	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	17		NA
$ **Shark** Navigator Professional NV360	74	$220	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	NA	▲▲	▼	▲▲	▲	14	●	NA
✓ **Kenmore** Pet Friendly CrossOver 31220	73	$250	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	NA	▲▲	●	▲▲	●	18	●	NA
✓ **Dyson** Ball Animal 2	73	$450	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	NA	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	17	●	NA
✓ **Dyson** Ball Multi Floor 2	73	$400	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	NA	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▼	16	●	NA
$ **Kenmore** AllergenSeal DU2012	73	$130	●	●	●	▲▲	▲	NA	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	15	●	NA
✓ **Kenmore** Elite Pet Friendly CrossOver Ultra 31230	72	$350	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	NA	▲▲	●	▲▲	●	18	●	NA
$ **Shark** Navigator Lift-Away LA300	71	$200	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	NA	▲▲	▼	▲▲	▲	12		NA
BAGGED UPRIGHT VACUUMS															
$ **Kenmore** Elite Pet Friendly 31150	77	$350	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	NA	▲▲	●	▲	●	21	●	NA
$ **Kenmore** BU1018	75	$350	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	NA	▲▲	●	▲▲	▼	21		NA
✓ **Kirby** Avalir 2 (no HEPA filter)	74	$1,600	▲	▼	▲▲	▲▲	▲	NA	▲▲	▼	▲▲	▼	23	●	NA
$ **Kenmore** Pet Friendly 31140	73	$280	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	NA	▲▲	●	▲▲	●	20	●	NA
$ **Kenmore** Intuition BU4022	68	$200	●	●	●	▲▲	▲	NA	▲▲	●	▲▲	●	15	●	NA
BAGGED CANISTER VACUUMS															
✓ **Miele** Complete C3 Marin	84	$1,300	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	NA	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	23	●	NA
✓ **Kenmore** Elite Pet Friendly UltraPlush 81714	76	$530	▲	●	▲	▲▲	▲	NA	▲▲	●	▲▲	●	25	●	NA
✓ **Kenmore** Elite Pet Friendly CrossOver 21814	76	$500	▲	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	NA	▲▲	▼	▲	●	26	●	NA
CORDLESS STICK VACUUMS															
Miele Triflex HX1 Facelift SMUL1	77	$600	–	–	●	▲▲	NA	▲▲	▲▲	NA	▲▲	▲▲	8.0		25
Shark Vertex Pro IZ662H	75	$450	●	▲	●	▲▲	NA	▲▲	▲▲	NA	▲▲	▲	8.9		35
Dyson Outsize+	72	$900	▼	▲	▲	▲▲	NA	▲▲	▲▲	NA	▲▲	▲▲	7.8		38
Dyson V15 Detect+ Cordless	71	$750	▼	▲	▲	▲▲	NA	▲▲	▲▲	NA	▲▲	▲▲	7.1		35
Dyson Gen5detect	71	$950	▼	▲	▲	▲▲	NA	▲▲	▲▲	NA	▲▲	▲▲	7.6		35
Tineco Pure One S12	71	$600	–	–	●	▲	NA	▲▲	▲▲	NA	▲▲	▲▲	6.6		17
Dyson Gen5outsize	70	$1,050	▼	▲	▲	▲▲	NA	▲▲	▲▲	NA	▲▲	▲▲	8.5		36
Miele Triflex HX1 SMUL0	70	$500	–	–	▼	▲▲	NA	▲▲	▲▲	NA	▲▲	▲▲	8.0		24

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/vacuum-cleaners.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on the performance ratings combined with survey-based scores for **predicted reliability** and **owner satisfaction.** We evaluate all vacuums on how well they clean medium-pile **carpet** and **bare floors** and how effectively they pick up **pet hair.** We also measure their **noise** levels. Our **clean emissions** score indicates how well the machines contain sucked-up debris. Uprights and canisters are scored for **handling** and **hose suction,** while cordless stick vacuums are scored on **run time** and how well they clean **edges.** A dash (–) indicates insufficient data.

LA PASTA DI GRAGNANO
NET WEIGHT 16 OZ (453g)
DE CECCO
dal 1886
Kosher Salt
The versatile gourmet salt of choice for Kosher cooking holiday time or any time
Black Beans
Frijoles Negros
260 years of expertise
SO MUCH MORE THAN HOT
TABASCO
Net wt 5 oz (142g)

SAVE BIG AT THE SUPERMARKET

Shopping for food has really changed, with far more opportunities to pay less. Here's what grocers are also doing to save you time and make this chore more fun.

BY BRIAN VINES

TECHNOLOGY HAS invaded almost every aspect of my life. I pay my phone bill via smartphone, unlock restaurant menus by scanning QR codes, and store my airline tickets in my digital wallet. But until recently I hadn't expected tech to be involved when it comes to buying a gallon of milk.

Now we're talking shopping carts that weigh your produce for you. Store coupons that appear on your phone. Palm readers that connect the veins in your hand to your credit card number.

Most of us still go to walk-in stores to grocery shop. And to keep us coming, stores big and small are innovating in ways that, taken as a whole, are dramatically changing–and often improving–the food-shopping experience.

It's not just about new technology. Supermarkets are expanding loyalty and coupon programs, offering more high-quality and lower-cost house brands, and providing accommodations and conveniences that make food shopping less of a hassle. Some are even luring us in with experiences, for instance, by providing an opportunity to meet up with a friend at a smoothie bar, as you can at the Erewhon grocery store chain in California.

Of course, for most of us, price is a major motivator when deciding where to shop for food. While you don't need government data to confirm what your receipts already show, food inflation is up 26.3 percent from 2019 to the present, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. That's a little higher than the 25 percent overall inflation rate for the same period. The market shock of the pandemic, ongoing supply chain problems, rising labor costs, the Avian flu outbreak–there are many reasons food prices keep rising, including price gouging.

Fortunately, some of the innovations at supermarkets also offer ways to help us get costs under control. What follows is a guide to the changes happening on the supermarket front and how to take advantage of them, whether at super-chains like Albertsons, Kroger, or Publix, or at smaller independents like Gelson's (in Southern California) or King Kullen (on Long Island in New York).

Breakfast Bargains Honey Nut Cheerios has many store-brand stand-ins that may be less pricey but just as tasty.

The Rise of the Private Label

You might assume that a store brand of any given food is a poorer-quality imitation of its name-brand cousin. But supermarkets these days are working to change that perception because they have bigger profit margins on store-brand foods and they know that having high-quality, budget-friendly store brands makes you want to shop with them, says Burt Flickinger III, managing director at the Strategic Resource Group, a consumer industry consulting firm based in New York.

So perhaps to help give them cachet, stores are offering more "specialty" house brands. Albertsons has nine, including Open Nature (for preservative-free items) and Waterfront Bistro (for frozen shrimp and other seafood). Walmart just launched Bettergoods, meant to offer more heightened culinary experiences while still being lower-priced, with

PHOTO: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS

offerings like Creamy Corn Jalapeno Chowder and Cold Brew Coffee Premium Ice Cream.

In Flickinger's view, shoppers make no sacrifice in quality by choosing store brands. They cost 15 to 25 percent less than their brand-name versions, a discount that increases to 50 percent for personal care and health products, he says.

Rewarding Loyalty Programs

Supermarket loyalty clubs have been around for a while, but to draw new and repeat customers, retailers are making them more rewarding. In the past, they gave you access to sale pricing on items. Today, in addition to discounts, several have cash-back-type programs that reward you for in-store spending. For example, when you join the Kroger Plus loyalty program, you can earn 1 fuel point for every dollar you spend shopping. One hundred fuel points earn you 10 cents off a gallon of gas at Kroger Family of Stores Fuel Centers and partner gas stations.

Stop & Shop has a similar loyalty rewards program, as does the Midwestern grocery chain Hy-Vee.

Mobile Apps for In-Store Shopping

Supermarket apps are being reimagined to be useful not just for online ordering but also for in-store shopping as well. If you're a loyalty club member, the store's app will let you clip the coupons virtually and add them to your account. Meijer's mobile app is typical: You browse coupons and click on the ones you want. Then they're automatically applied to your order at checkout.

NATIONWIDE SUPERMARKET CHAINS

A mix of small independent grocers and large regional chain supermarkets are primarily responsible for keeping our cupboards full. But in recent years, a handful of grocers have been establishing a more national presence. If one or more of the stores below aren't already in your neck of the woods, they may be soon.

Aldi has over 2,000 stores in 39 states and plans to open 800 more by the end of 2028. Based in Germany, the store is bare-bones–you'll generally find no pharmacy or café–nor does it issue or honor coupons. But you'll find low prices on the products that are Aldi-exclusive, which 90 percent of the offerings are. Make sure to bring a quarter because you'll need it as a deposit for a shopping cart.

Costco's rotisserie chickens have become a national obsession and are now roasting at over 600 locations across 47 states. The warehouse club derives revenue from membership fees ($60 to $120 a year), which helps keep the markups on the products it sells—most in bulk sizes—low. While typical supermarkets stock about 30,000 products, Costco has just around 4,000. Its house brand, Kirkland Signature, is top-notch.

Target can now be found in all 50 states with more than 1,950 stores, most of which sell food at competitive prices. It has a dozen private-label grocery brands, including nine for its wine and spirit collections. If you pay with a Target Circle credit card, you get 5 percent off on your purchases.

Trader Joe's, with 549 stores in 42 states, calls itself a national chain of neighborhood grocery stores. TJ's claims that its prices are substantially lower than those at typical supermarkets because it stocks private-label offerings almost exclusively. The store doesn't issue or redeem coupons or have sales. And there's no loyalty club, online shopping, or curbside pickup.

Walmart The retail behemoth has 3,559 Supercenters—stores that sell general merchandise plus have full-service supermarkets—as well as 673 smaller-footprint Neighborhood Markets. "Everyday Low Prices" is the company's mantra. The chain's buying power allows it to demand lower wholesale prices so it can pass savings on to shoppers.

Whole Foods, known for its wide selection of organic products, has 516 stores across 44 states. The grocer is sometimes referred to as "whole paycheck" for its high prices, but its private label 365 Everyday Value and Whole Foods Market brands are less pricey. Acquired by Amazon in 2017, the walk-in stores provide a hub for pickups and returns from the online retailer.

On the Aisle
Stores with space to accommodate wheelchairs and other devices help people with mobility issues.

Some supermarket apps do even more. Instead of having to scour the aisles for on-sale items, Hy-Vee's app will sort them into a list for you. The Walmart app shares inventory status at your designated store so that you can make sure what you want is in stock, and it has a store map to help make your shopping more efficient.

Smarter Sampling

The free samples are part of the fun during a trip to Costco. But for the brands that host them, sampling stations are an expensive proposition.

Now "companies looking to connect with customers are leaning into the idea of automated sampling," says Jordan Berke, CEO at Tomorrow, a digital retail consulting firm. For example, Freeosk is an automated sampling station available at more than 1,400 supermarkets across the U.S., including some Sam's Club and ShopRite stores. Users who have downloaded the Freeosk app can scan a QR code at the kiosk to get an individually wrapped sample. Recent offers have included Clif ZBar energy bars and Kinder's burger sauce.

Other stores offer try-before-you-buy options. At Whole Foods, staffers can "open a bag of chips, slice a piece of fruit, or twist open bottled iced tea" if they'd like to taste them, according to the company website. Although each store sets its own policy, some Trader Joe's also let you sample anything in the store if you ask for a taste.

Speedy Checkout

Stores are experimenting with automated checkout and payment technology. Some Kroger, Schnucks, and ShopRite stores are piloting "smart carts" equipped with sensors and scanners that keep a running tab on items you put in them so that you can bypass the register altogether. The carts have an integrated scale that weighs produce and a screen where you can keep an eye on the running tally and pay for your purchases. Since 2022, Whole Foods Market has been testing Dash Cart, its own version of a smart cart. And over 500 Whole Foods stores, as well as some other grocery and convenience stores, are equipped with Amazon One palm readers, which allows you to map your palm and its underlying vein structure via your smartphone to link to a payment method.

Special Savings

Supermarkets are also finding ways to offer perks to older Americans. At the 139 Fred Meyer locations in the Northwest, customers 55 and up get 10 percent off the store's private-label brands on the first Tuesday of every month. Fry's Food Stores in Arizona offer a 10 percent discount to the 55-and-up crowd at its 128 stores the first Wednesday of a month. Discounts come with more frequency at Gristedes in New York City, where people over 55 get 10 percent off every Tuesday.

Many large supermarkets, including Kroger and Walmart, also have motorized seated shopping carts on hand for folks who need them.

Brian Vines, a member of CR's Special Projects team since 2020, has a passion for social justice and deal-hunting.

ILLUSTRATION BY JASON SCHNEIDER

GROCERY CHAINS WITH SOMETHING EXTRA

Some shoppers want more from their supermarkets than just low prices. Here's how some stores appeal to customers who prize a more elevated shopping experience:

1

COMPLIMENTARY COOKIES

That's what Florida-based Publix offers kids, who can have their pick of chocolate chip or sugar cookies for tagging along on a grocery run. Just head to the bakery to ask for one.

2

HEALTH CHECKS

Compare Foods in North Carolina partners with local healthcare systems to host free diabetes and cholesterol screenings. Hy-Vee stores offer a 1-hour personalized shopping experience with a dietitian who can tailor food recommendations. The $25 fee is waived for shoppers who make a $100 grocery purchase.

3

FREE KNIFE SHARPENING

To stay a cut above their competitors, Raley's Supermarkets, with 121 stores in California and Nevada, offers free knife sharpening. Shoppers can hand over up to three dull blades at a time to an employee in the butcher department and pick them up in 24 hours.

4

STORES WITH CAFÉS

When it comes to elevating the grocery store experience, Erewhon in California is in a class by itself. Its 10 outposts in the Los Angeles area have cafés with organic food and smoothie bars featuring the beautifying Hailey Bieber's Strawberry Glaze Skin Smoothie with organic fruit, vanilla collagen, and sea moss. Some stores even have valet parking.

5

IN-HOUSE BAKERIES

Texas-based H-E-B, which has more than 435 stores in Mexico and Texas, is famous for the tortillas it makes daily. If your timing is good, you could be rewarded with a free sample fresh from the oven.

1

2

3

4

5

PHOTO, FACING PAGE: WHOLE FOODS. PHOTOS, THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: PUBLIX; ADOBE STOCK; HY-VEE; HAYDEN SPEARS; EREWHON

Have You Been Hacked on

... or hit with scammy ads, weird friend requests, or a flood of cat videos you just

Facebook...

don't want to see? Here's how to make social media feel good again.

BY JENNIFER COOK

SOCIAL MEDIA SITES LIKE FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM used to be fun places to share photos, news, and more. But in recent years they've become more fraught—venues where scams, annoying ads, and unknown friend requests live alongside your real friends' posts. Everyone seems to have a bad experience to share:

- **Patti Regehr,** a retired teacher in northern California, heard from puzzled Facebook friends that they were getting new friend requests from her. The reason? Someone had stolen Regehr's photo, created a bogus FB page, and started impersonating her.
- **Paulette J. Phillips,** a regular QVC.com shopper in central Wisconsin, saw an ad with the QVC logo for bargain-priced brand-name shoes on Facebook. She bought them with her debit card and later got a fraud alert from her bank saying that someone in New York had used her card for a $50 purchase.
- **Paul Signorelli,** a technology trainer in the San Francisco Bay Area who consults on how to use social media safely, proved that even the experts can be fooled when he clicked on a video link from someone posing as a friend. "Wrong decision," he says, "because it wasn't from that person ... and I got hacked."

These problems affect millions of people. But you can sidestep many of these headaches and reclaim your enjoyment of social media sites. Here, answers to important questions from CR and social media experts.

Q: I just got a friend request from a stranger. Should I say yes?

A: Sixty-seven percent of people who use social media have received friend requests from people they don't know, according to a nationally representative CR survey of 2,042 U.S. adults conducted in April 2024. Before accepting, see if you have Facebook friends in common, and then check with them. Is this a legitimate contact? Go to their profile to see who they're affiliated with and what they post. And if anything seems fishy, say no.

"There is the danger of people with malicious intent trying to become your friend to lure you into a scam," says Larry Magid, co-founder and CEO of ConnectSafely, a nonprofit that creates resources for safe tech use. Or they may want to exploit your friends list, which was the case for Patti Regehr. (She reported the incident to Facebook, which removed the impersonator's FB account.)

"On Facebook, your safety is also your friends' safety," says Macaulee Cassaday, program director of Cyber-Seniors, a nonprofit that connects young volunteers with older people who want tech help. If you say yes and then regret it, you can unfriend the person.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SAM ISLAND

Q: How can I see fewer Facebook ads for shoes—or politicians?

A: If you've viewed one Facebook or Instagram ad too many for multivitamins or slingback sandals, hit the three dots at the upper right and choose "Hide ad." Or click on "Why am I seeing this ad?" to pull up several options, including "Hide all ads from this advertiser."

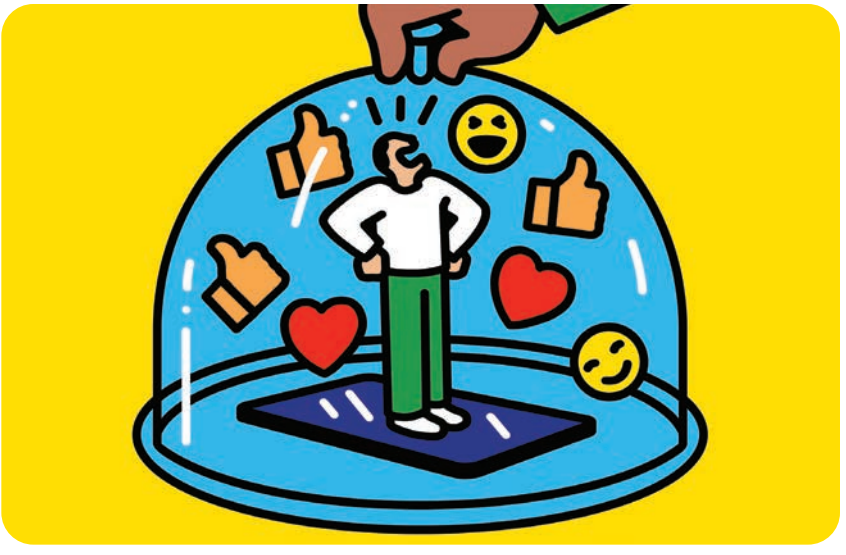
Did you watch some cute cat reels and now regret it because your feed is flooded with them? Tap those same three dots and choose "Show less" to cut back.

To make broad changes, go into Settings and click on "Accounts Center," then "Ad preferences" and the "Customize ads" tab. There you can see all of the companies that have been sending you advertising and control their access individually. Or you can click on "Ad topics" and ask to "See less" of certain topics, such as political ads, or ads for anything from alcohol to gambling to parenting. (These instructions are for when you're using a computer; they differ slightly if you're using a smartphone.)

If your Facebook and Instagram accounts are linked, your preferences will be changed on both platforms.

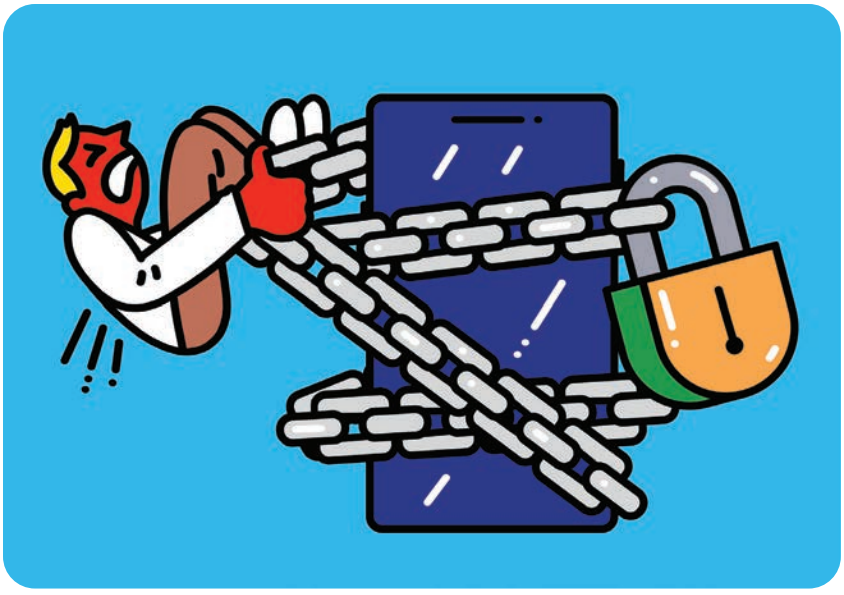
Q: How can I avoid annoying posts from one of my online friends?

A: You may love your brother-in-law, but not the political rants he puts on Facebook or the silly memes he insists on reposting to Instagram. You have several options to discreetly regain some peace of mind without causing a family rift. First, you can "unfollow" a contact on both platforms, which means you won't see their posts in your feed, though you'll still be connected. Facebook lets you "snooze" a friend, so you won't see their posts for 30 days, which could be just the break you need. On Instagram, "muting" people keeps their posts out of your feed. And you can "block" someone, which stops them from seeing your posts and you from seeing theirs. Here comes the discretion part: Facebook and Instagram won't alert the other person that you've taken any of these steps.



Q: Is it safe to buy stuff on Facebook Marketplace?

A: Be careful: You're buying from an individual, not from Facebook. But Facebook Marketplace can have great deals, and many people buy items without incident. The experts' tips: First, check out the seller's profile to see their selling history and their numerical rating–1 (worst) to 5 (best)–from people who have bought from them. Communicate only through messaging so that you have a record if you need to report a problem. And be on the alert for red flags, such as a seller who asks for a deposit to hold something or one who threatens to rescind an offer if you don't pick up an item right away. If you plan to meet to buy something, agree on the price first, meet in a public place, and bring a friend.



Q: What can I do to keep from getting hacked or scammed?

A: For starters, set up a unique, strong password for every online account, including email accounts, retailer accounts, and, yes, social media accounts. (A password manager such as the top-rated 1Password can help.) Use two-factor (or multifactor) authentication to add another layer of protection.

Next, remember that the more information you put out on social media—say, the names and ages of your kids and grandkids—the more information can be gathered by people who might want to scam you. Never share sensitive information like where you bank, your address, or your phone number. And post only what you'd be comfortable sharing publicly, no matter what privacy settings you use.

If your account has been hacked, you may be locked out. Follow the social media platform's account recovery instructions; for Facebook, go to facebook.com/hacked to get started. (Your chances of account recovery are better if you've followed the security practices we've listed.)

Once you recover control, you'll need to change your password and review your account recovery information, such as your email address. Check for messages the hacker sent from your account or for new friends you don't recognize. Finally, alert your friends in an email or by texting or posting.

Q: Can I protect my privacy while enjoying Facebook groups?

A: There's a difference between public and private groups. If you plan to share a lot in a new Facebook group—for example, baby photos or details of your forthcoming road trip—set it up to be private. (There's no 100 percent guarantee of privacy, Signorelli says, "because if somebody takes a screenshot and reposts it on their account, then it's out in the public.")

What if you're joining an existing group? Your privacy settings dictate what other people will learn from your profile, Cassaday says. To see the options, use the Facebook Privacy Checkup. (Click on your profile pic, then "Settings & Privacy," then "Privacy Checkup.") This will give you a number of ways to make things more private. For example, under "Who can see what you share," you can choose an audience of only friends for your birthday, current city, and posts. And you can create a digital avatar for your profile picture instead of uploading a real photo.

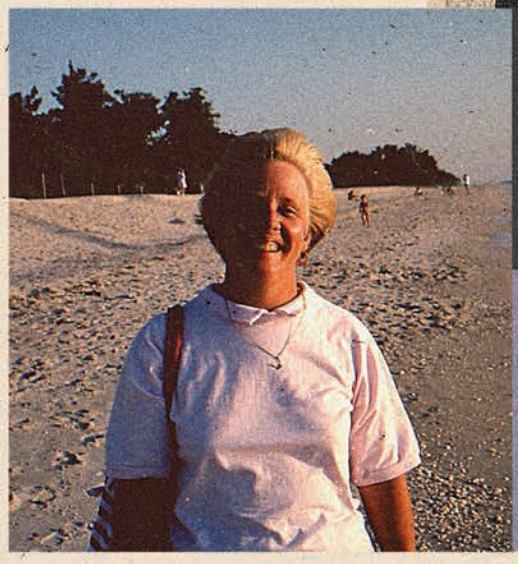
You can post anonymously in FB groups if the administrators allow it, but your name will still be visible to the administrators and moderators.

Want More Help?

Many libraries have resources such as classes on social media and internet use. In addition, the following can be useful.

- **Cyber-Seniors** is a nonprofit organization that pairs young, trained volunteers with older adults who want assistance with technology. Call 844-217-3057 or go to **cyberseniors.org/free-tech-help**.
- **CR Security Planner** provides personalized advice on avoiding scams, recovering hacked accounts, and more.

Scan this QR code to access the Consumer Reports Security Planner.



Celebrating a Life
A collection of photos from Barbara Harper's life brings back happy memories for her daughters Kelly Avery and Kristin Harper.

The Last Goodbye

BEST NEW WAYS TO PLAN A FUNERAL

Finally, a complete guide to giving loved ones the right send-off—from traditional services to new green burials.

By Janet Siroto

SIX YEARS AGO, Kelly Avery and Kristin Harper, sisters from Birmingham, Ala., gathered their families by the sky-blue ocean waters of Destin, Fla., to memorialize their mother, Barbara Harper.

They shared funny stories and music, and shed some tears as they spread their mother's ashes from the deck of a large boat. The captain played the Beach Boys' "Barbara Ann" over the public address system in her honor.

The experience not only gave the family a meaningful way to pay tribute to Barbara but also got the sisters thinking about their own memorials. When it's her time to go, Kelly says, "I would also want a party filled with laughter and fond memories."

Like Kelly and Kristin, many people are embracing a new model for saying goodbye to family members and other loved ones. Cremation, for instance, is growing in popularity, as are environmentally gentle burials and even at-home funeral services.

And whether these services are traditional or more unusual, there are now more ways than ever to personalize end-of-life arrangements—and to keep them low-cost.

The key is making some choices well beforehand, which more people appear to be doing. For instance, according to an April 2024 Consumer Reports nationally representative survey of 2,042 adults in the U.S., 50 percent said they planned or intended to plan ahead either for their own funeral or for someone else's. Read on for a rundown of possibilities and costs.

Traditional Burial

This still popular choice often gets a more personalized spin these days. It's all in the details, which you get to choose.

These burials may be what their name suggests—traditional—but lately they tend to come with more personal touches, says Glenda Stansbury, a licensed funeral director and celebrant in the Oklahoma City area: "I see more focus on telling a person's life story" than on a religious ceremony.

And many details are up to you. For instance, embalming may not be mandatory, though it's strongly suggested for open-casket services. The only musts are the fees for basic services (funeral planning, transporting and storing remains, permits, copies of the death certificate), and anything the state calls for.

How to choose? Ask for prices at a couple of local funeral homes. A typical package may include everything the fee for basic services covers, a visitation or viewing and/or a graveside service, the use of a hearse and limousines, and embalming and dressing the body. With a $2,500 casket and $1,700 vault (a concrete box for the casket), the cost is nearly $10,000—and can run higher.

A funeral home must give you a list of its goods and services when you call or visit, says Melissa Dickey, an attorney and co-coordinator of the Federal Trade Commission's Funeral Rule program. That won't include sales tax, the cemetery plot (often $2,000 and up) and fees for opening and closing the grave ($900 and up). A headstone adds another $1,000 to $3,000 on average, according to Empathy, a website that offers what it calls a "comprehensive support system" for bereaved families.

If you have a set amount to spend, "let the funeral director know, and see what they can put together for you," says Christopher P. Robinson, president-elect of the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA).

There's another increasingly popular option: a home funeral, the norm in the U.S. before the 19th century, says Shannon Lee Dawdy, PhD, a University of Chicago anthropologist and author of "American Afterlives" (Princeton University Press, 2021). The body remains at home for several days as family and friends say their farewells. Some people also have a formal funeral service there. Get more information at homefuneralalliance.org.

TRADITIONAL BURIAL

$9,995

MONEY-SAVER

The 'Costco Casket'

With a viewing, a full funeral service, the use of a hearse and limo, a $2,500 casket, and more, a traditional burial can get pretty pricey. One way to reduce costs is to buy a casket from Costco.com, which has models for $1,500. Not a member? Retailers such as Amazon and Walmart also offer lower-priced caskets.

PHOTOS, PREVIOUS SPREAD: COURTESY OF KELLY AVERY AND KRISTIN HARPER

SHOULD YOU PUT ASIDE FUNERAL FUNDS NOW?

It's wise to consider how to cover funeral costs ahead of time. But what's the best way? Here, the pros and cons of three options.

Opening a final expenses bank account. An interest-bearing "payable on death" savings account is a smart way to set aside money for

PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS BY KLAWE RZECZY

Cremation

It's America's favorite exit strategy and is expected to become even more common.

CREMATION

$6,280

This fee covers the costs of the cremation itself and an urn for the cremains, along with services such as transporting and preparing the body, a funeral home viewing and formal service, death certificates, and printed materials such as memorial cards and a guest book.

Cremation, which has outstripped burial in recent years by 60.5 percent vs. 34.5 percent, according to the NFDA, typically involves using heat and flames to reduce human remains to tiny bone fragments commonly called ashes but more accurately referred to as "cremains."

Beyond the basics, you've got several options. The least expensive and most straightforward is direct cremation, where the body goes to a crematorium without a viewing or service. While costs vary, the NFDA lists a national average price of $3,290, and Cremation.com quotes an average of $2,000.

You may also find much lower prices. For instance, some ads for direct cremation in New York State cite starting fees of $595; services like transporting the body may increase costs.

If you instead choose a funeral home viewing, with embalming and preparing the body (recommended for a viewing), and transferring cremains back to the family, the median price in 2023 was $4,665. A formal service before cremation costs an additional $1,615.

As with traditional burials, it's wise to check with a couple of providers before you choose one. Some funeral homes have their own crematoriums, and many others can help you make arrangements with local facilities, including those for direct cremation. The Cremation Association of North America offers a directory at cremationassociation.org (click on "Find a Provider").

You'll also want to plan for what to do with the cremains after any ceremony is over. Some people keep them at home in a container they choose. Funeral homes typically offer these, at a median price of $295. Amazon has carved rosewood boxes for $13 and up, and urns for $15 and up. Or cremains can be divided among family members. You'll find mini urns and small decorative or commemorative boxes for that purpose with a Google search.

Cremains can also be placed in a columbarium (a bookcase-like structure at a cemetery that holds urns) at a cost that can range from about $750 to $3,125, according to Cremation.com. And some people bury cremains in a cemetery, a pricier option because you have to pay for the plot and cover other cemetery fees. If you want to scatter the ashes, some cemeteries allow this in certain areas, as do some public spaces. Check the rules first. For instance, you can sprinkle cremains in parts of Yosemite National Park, but you need permission.

arrangements. When the time comes, the funds can be transferred to an appointed family member or friend. Ask at your bank or credit union.

Paying in advance. It's fine to purchase a burial plot well before it's needed, but funeral directors also often suggest prepaying for funeral home services. This isn't necessarily in your best interest, according to the nonprofit Funeral Consumers Alliance (FCA). What if the funeral home closes or your survivors don't know or forget that you prepaid?

Buying an insurance policy. Burial insurance (also known as final expense insurance) pays $5,000 to $25,000 when you die, with monthly premiums of about $50 to $100 for a $10,000 death benefit. Some funeral homes and insurance agents and brokers offer "pre-need" insurance in which you pick a funeral package and the payout goes to a specific funeral home after your death. In both of those cases, you'll likely spend more on premiums than the policies pay out, according to the FCA. Some policies also have waiting periods of, say, one to three years. If you die too soon into the policy, your survivors may get far less than the full amount.

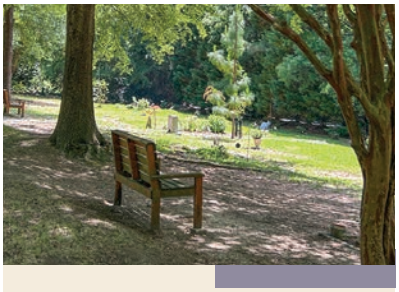
Source: Prices for the traditional burial and cremation packages above are from the 2023 National Funeral Directors Association's Member General Price List Study.

4 More Ways to Go

Here, options that are more eco-friendly and often less costly than a traditional burial or cremation.

GREEN BURIALS You dig a grave by hand and cover the body with dirt. That's a green burial, which generally uses no chemicals–such as embalming fluid–"and no outer burial container except those that are biodegradable," says Edward Bixby, founder of the Global Green Burial Alliance. Instead of a headstone, you can save GPS coordinates to the plot.

Green cemeteries (some located within traditional cemeteries) tend to look like nature preserves with paths. Check greenburialcouncil.org for providers who can work with you.



GREEN BURIAL

$2,000-$5,000

It can be as simple as placing the body in the ground in one of 456 park-like cemeteries in the U.S. and Canada—or you can include a viewing and full funeral service plus a biodegradable casket.

Depending on factors like your location and the options you choose (will the body be wrapped in a cotton shroud or placed in a biodegradable casket?), these may range from $2,000 to $5,000.

WATER CREMATION Considered more eco-friendly than regular high-heat cremation, alkaline hydrolysis uses water, chemicals, and heat to speed decomposition. It's legal in more than 20 states, with costs starting at around $1,995 and averaging $3,500. Search for "alkaline hydrolysis" to find a provider.

DONATING YOUR BODY Medical schools use donated bodies for research or teaching and may cremate them afterward. Hospitals retrieve organs from donated bodies, often returning the body to the family afterward. In both, a funeral provider is usually needed for services like transportation, which the family generally pays for. To designate a facility for donation, check for the "anatomical gift program" at medical school websites, or "body donor" or "anatomical donor program" at hospitals.

BURIAL AT SEA Here, cremains or a body are taken by boat out to sea for release in the water. While the military has a long history of providing this for personnel, it's an option for anyone who has the proper permits and follows government guidelines. Search for "burial at sea" and "charter boat" to find operators who can help or connect you with funeral directors experienced in such burials. Cost depends on location, how many people will be onboard, and how far a boat must travel. One California provider publishes prices of $6,130 and up.

HOW TO MAKE YOUR WISHES KNOWN

It's important to put your end-of-life plans in an advance directive, a legal document of your healthcare and other wishes. You can fill out this state-specific form yourself and give copies to key family members or friends.

Or consider creating a "when I die" file and sharing it with loved ones. Online repositories such as Prisidio and Everplans will make your advance directive and other essential information—such as life insurance account passwords—available to a trusted person or two when they're needed.

Documents aside, it's also a good idea to talk with family members about your end-of-life preferences so that you can work through any questions or concerns. Need a hand getting the conversation started? Tips on the Conversation Project website will help pave the way.

Scan this QR code to find a list of advance directive forms for every state.

PHOTO: OAKWOOD CEMETERY, RALEIGH, N.C. (GREEN BURIAL)

ROAD REPORT

NEWS & EXPERT ADVICE TO KEEP YOU AHEAD OF THE CURVE™

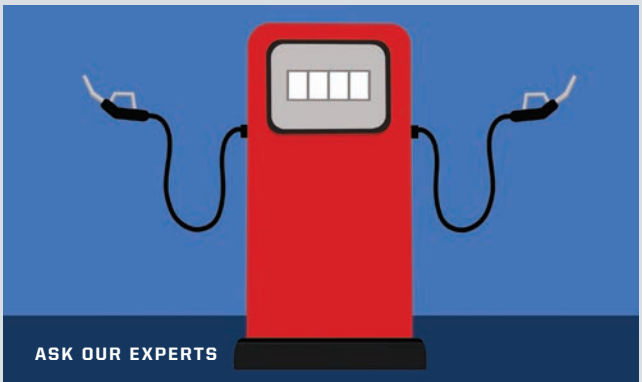
FIRST DRIVE

Toyota Camry

The redesigned Camry sedan will come only as a hybrid, with all-wheel drive available on every trim level along with tons of standard features, including blind spot warning and wireless phone charging. Toyota says fuel economy will be between 44 mpg and 51 mpg combined.

CR'S TAKE: The updated hybrid powertrain is smooth and quiet, and offers power when needed. An attractive interior and absorbent suspension move this mainstream model closer to being a luxury car than its price suggests.

BASE PRICE RANGE $28,400-$36,125
DESTINATION CHARGE $1,095
PRICE AS DRIVEN $34,295



ASK OUR EXPERTS

Will I not be able to buy a gas car in 10 years?

Though social media posts claim otherwise, the Biden administration's rule that automakers amp up **electric vehicle** production, starting in 2027, doesn't mean you'll be forced to buy an EV. "Let me be clear: We are **not banning gasoline vehicles,** and we are not mandating electric vehicles," EPA Administrator Michael Regan told CR. Automakers will be able to meet the emissions requirements with EVs, hybrids, and plug-in hybrids (PHEVs), as well as with **more efficient gas cars.** There will be a mix of vehicles available to buy.

THE VITAL STATISTIC

33 MILLION

The number of vehicles affected by recalls in the U.S. in 2023—the highest in 10 years.
KEY REASONS: New tech and software that don't have all the bugs worked out. But the fixes are free.

Source: Society of Automotive Analysts.

RECALL

Ford SUVs

Ford previously recalled over half a million 2020 to 2023 Escape and 2021 to 2023 Bronco Sport SUVs with 1.5-liter, three-cylinder engines to address a fire risk from a potential cracked fuel injector issue. Now it has expanded the action to include an additional 42,652 2022 and 2023 SUVs.
WHAT TO DO: Ford dealerships will update engine control software to include fuel injector leak detection and install a drain tube, free of charge. For more information, call Ford at 866-436-7332.

SAFETY MATTERS

Drunk Driving Limits May Be Changing

The National Transportation Safety Board recommends that states lower the blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limit for drivers from the current 0.08 to 0.05. An adult might reach this limit after consuming three to four beers or a couple of glasses of wine, according to researchers from the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation. Utah lowered its BAC limit to 0.05 a few years ago, and a National Highway Traffic Safety Administration study showed that after that, the state had an 18 percent reduction in traffic deaths. Other states are now considering similar legislation. NHTSA says that every day about 37 people die in drunk driving crashes.

PHOTO: TOYOTA

ILLUSTRATION BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

The Most Comfortable Cars You Can Buy

A smooth ride, a quiet interior, supportive seats, and adjustable seat belts can all increase the pleasure of driving—and make you safer.

BY JONATHAN LINKOV

ILLUSTRATION BY BORJA BONAQUE

YOU MIGHT THINK that to be comfortable, a car just needs cushy seats and the ability to absorb bumps in the road. Those factors are important, but not the only ones that determine comfort. Others to take into consideration include how well the car muffles road and wind noise, how well your body fits in the driver's seat, and how much effort it takes to get in and out of the car and reach and use the controls.

It's also a mistake to think that comfort is a luxury–nice to have but not necessary. "Comfort is an important element in driver safety," says Alex Knizek, CR's associate director of auto test development. "You can be more attentive to driving if you're not distracted by a sore back or achy legs. Plus, in a comfortable car, you'll arrive at your destination more refreshed."

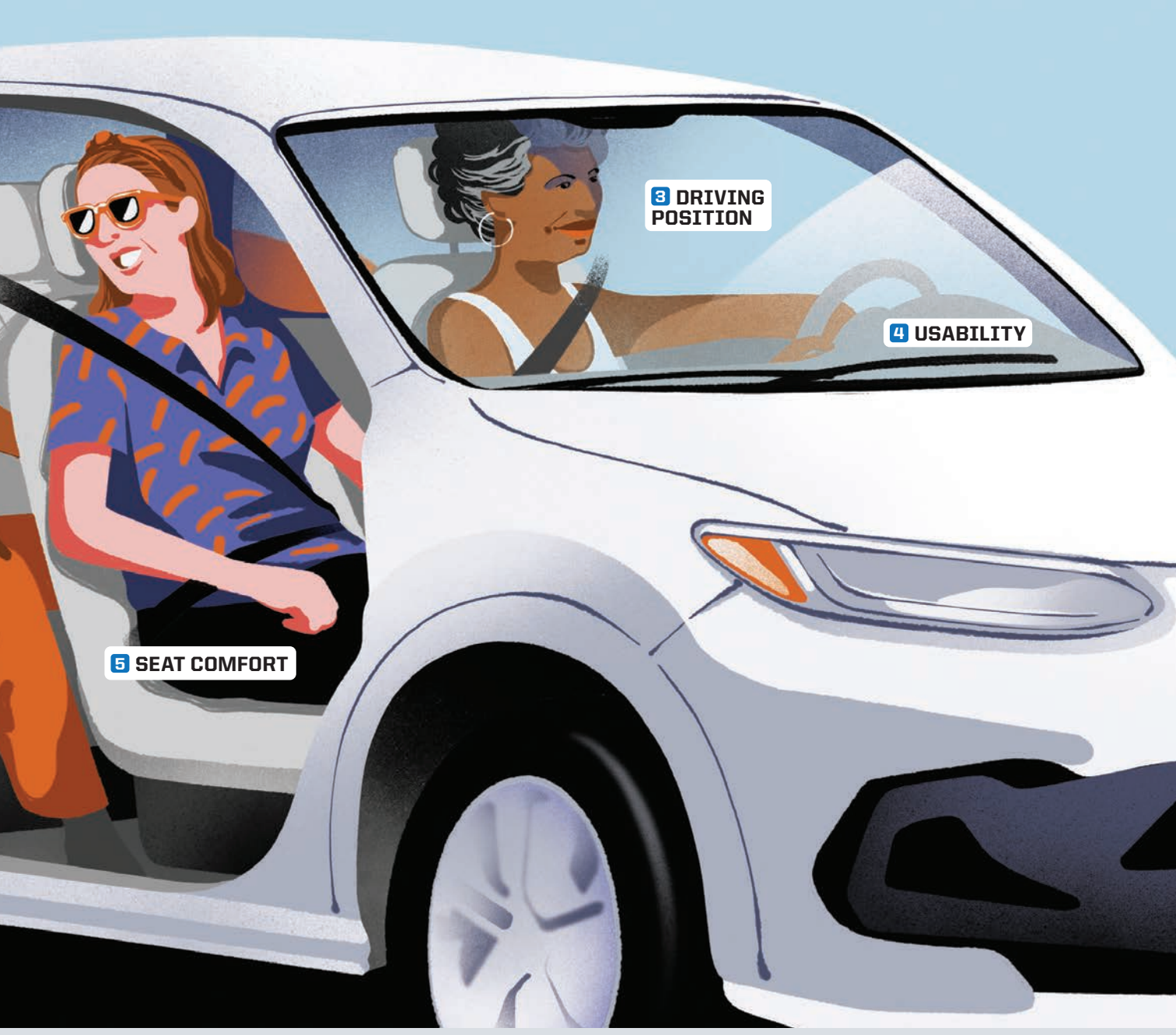
In CR's ratings of about 240 new cars, we created a comfort score based on our evaluation of six factors: ride, noise, driving position, usability, seat comfort, and access. Ratings for these factors are based on scoring from testers of different heights and sizes who drove thousands of miles.

1 RIDE

A car's suspension should keep passengers from feeling the impact of driving over potholes and should smooth out bumps. The best suspensions keep the vehicle settled, minimizing small and large motions that can quickly tire the driver.

2 NOISE

Whether it's wind, road, engine, or tire noise, the car should minimize



those sounds creeping into the cabin so that front-seat occupants can easily conduct a conversation with people in the back seats. Some noise is fine, even in luxury cars, but the driver should never be annoyed by excessive noise or noise that is grating or harsh.

3 DRIVING POSITION

An optimal seating position lets drivers easily get comfortable behind the steering wheel so that they can clearly see out the windows and over the hood, access seat belts, and reach the pedals without straining.

4 USABILITY

Drivers need to reach the controls and see the displays easily so that they can access them without having to lean forward or lift themselves off the seat. The more you have to struggle to access core controls—such as the climate system, infotainment screen, and turn signal or wiper stalks—the more you'll be distracted and get fatigued.

5 SEAT COMFORT

A good seat will support your body evenly and allow you to relax, rather than make you work to support yourself. We've found that the best seats have a cushiony outer surface and a firm inner core, and the head restraint should be supportive but not intrusive. While the driver's comfort is of utmost importance, comfortable rear-seat passengers will be less likely to complain or disturb the driver.

6 ACCESS

Wide door openings and a low, narrow doorsill make entering and exiting a vehicle easier for passengers of most sizes and mobility levels.

CARS THAT ARE TOPS FOR COMFORT

These are the

COMPACT SUVs $35,000-$45,000

Honda CR-V

85 OVERALL SCORE

80 COMFORT SCORE

RIDE · NOISE · DRIVING POSITION · USABILITY · FRONT-SEAT COMFORT · REAR-SEAT COMFORT · FRONT ACCESS · REAR ACCESS

With this CR-V's 2023 redesign, a good SUV got even better. It scores well for its tall door openings and hip-height seats, both of which make it easy to step over the narrow doorsill and slide right in. The cabin is roomy, with hardly any intrusion from the center console into the driver's or passenger's knee space, and there is a ton of headroom. Most testers find that the driver's seat holds them in place through turns, offers good back and underleg support, and has enough adjustments so that you can fine-tune a comfortable position. The 60/40-split rear seat can recline and is roomy, with generous foot space and leg support, making it easy to catch a little shut-eye on a road trip. While the ride is on the firm side, the suspension does an effective job of absorbing most bumps. The controls are easy to use, thanks to physical buttons and knobs.

MIDSIZED 2-ROW SUVs $45,000-$55,000

Subaru Outback

79 OVERALL SCORE

82 COMFORT SCORE

RIDE · DRIVING POSITION · FRONT-SEAT COMFORT · FRONT ACCESS · NOISE · USABILITY · REAR-SEAT COMFORT · REAR ACCESS

If you like the Subaru Legacy but can't get a sedan to work for your lifestyle, the Outback takes all of the Legacy's goodness and wraps it in a lifted wagon/SUV body. This body style gives it the ability to carry more cargo behind the rear seats, in addition to on the roof, thanks to the built-in roof-rack crossbars. And the raised ride height allows it to handle deeper snow or gravel roads. The Outback's composed ride outshines that of many luxury SUVs. Be aware that the turbocharged engine in the XT trim is quieter and has more refinement than the base four-cylinder engine. We also like how the raised ride height makes it easier to get into the Outback than its sedan sibling. The front seats are comfortable and supportive, but they get better as you move up in trim level: The driver's seat in the Limited has a manual extendable under-thigh cushion.

MIDSIZED 3-ROW SUVs $45,000-$55,000

Subaru Ascent

79 OVERALL SCORE

84 COMFORT SCORE

RIDE · DRIVING POSITION · FRONT-SEAT COMFORT · FRONT ACCESS · NOISE · USABILITY · REAR-SEAT COMFORT · REAR ACCESS

The Ascent's ride is comfortable to the point of being plush, gliding over or swallowing up any bump, rut, or pothole thrown at it. Yet its body is always under control, never pitching about over the rough stuff. Open the big, wide doors and inside you'll find large, supportive seats that can fit a range of body types. We suggest getting the Premium trim at the least, which has an eight-way power-adjustable cloth driver's seat, while the Limited trim adds power to the front passenger seat and has more supportive leather seating surfaces. Whether you choose a version with the two captain's chairs or the three-person bench seat, the second row is seriously big, with supportive seats that even have reclining seatbacks. Wind and road noise are surprisingly low for such a big, boxy SUV, and the turbocharged four-cylinder engine rarely makes itself known.

PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS; MANUFACTURERS

models with the highest scores in seven categories. All are CR Recommended.

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs $45,000-$55,000

✓ BMW X3

86 OVERALL SCORE

79 COMFORT SCORE

RIDE ⏫ | NOISE ⏫⏫ | DRIVING POSITION ⏫ | USABILITY ❙ | FRONT-SEAT COMFORT ⏫⏫ | REAR-SEAT COMFORT ⏫ | FRONT ACCESS ⏫⏫ | REAR ACCESS ⏫

The X3 disproves the notion that a sporty, high-performance SUV and a comfortable ride are mutually exclusive. The first thing you notice after passing through the X3's large door openings is how comfortable and roomy the cabin is. You may even audibly "ahhh" as you settle into the supremely comfortable, bolstered seats (we suggest adding the optional four-way power-adjustable lumbar for more support). It's a plus that the passenger seat gets the same number of adjustments. The rear bench seat is roomy and comfortable for two adults but a bit tight for three. Out on the road, you quickly notice the distinct lack of wind and road noise. Even the engine is muted—until you call on it for spirited driving. But then its roar has a pleasant quality. While the X3's ride quality skews to the firm side, it does a good job of soaking up road imperfections without hurting handling.

LUXURY MIDSIZED/LARGE SUVs OVER $55,000

✓ BMW X5 PHEV

88 OVERALL SCORE

85 COMFORT SCORE

RIDE ⏫⏫ | NOISE ⏫⏫ | DRIVING POSITION ⏫ | USABILITY ❙ | FRONT-SEAT COMFORT ⏫⏫ | REAR-SEAT COMFORT ⏫ | FRONT ACCESS ⏫ | REAR ACCESS ⏫

The X5 optimally balances comfort, agility, and performance, thanks to a suspension that doesn't soak up bumps and ruts as much as it helps the SUV glide over them, to the point where passengers barely notice their presence. Impressively, the X5 PHEV has an even better ride than the regular X5. Both versions have a whisper-quiet cabin, and every touch point is pleasing and well padded. Plus, the optional door and center armrest heaters make cold mornings more bearable. BMW's elevated driving position offers a good view out, and the steering wheel has lots of tilt and telescope range, as do the supportive front seats, which are perfect for an all-day drive. While the rear seats are comfortable, the low seat cushion doesn't provide quite as much thigh support for adults as we would like. Also, shorter folks may find that their leg rubs on the doorsill when exiting the front or rear seats.

MIDSIZED/LARGE CARS $35,000-$45,000

✓ Subaru Legacy

77 OVERALL SCORE

80 COMFORT SCORE

RIDE ⏫⏫ | NOISE ⏫ | DRIVING POSITION ⏫ | USABILITY ⏫ | FRONT-SEAT COMFORT ⏫ | REAR-SEAT COMFORT ⏫ | FRONT ACCESS ⏫ | REAR ACCESS ⏫

Subaru's well-rounded Legacy is distinguished from its competitors by its ride quality. Its suspension soaks up bumps and potholes with a fluidity unmatched by some luxury cars. The cabin stays relatively quiet in everyday driving, while the turbo engine in the top versions can generate heaps of power without excessive noise (the standard engine can get reasonably loud under hard acceleration). The roomy driving position accommodates most body types well, with plentiful headroom, cushy armrests, and a well-designed, lightly padded cutout area that gives a bit of extra space for the driver's right knee and the passenger's left knee. We recommend the midlevel Limited trim, which comes with supportive power-adjustable leather front seats for the driver and passenger. Visibility all around is very good, so there's no neck strain when checking a blind spot or reversing.

CARS THAT ARE TOPS FOR COMFORT *Continued*

LUXURY CARS $45,000-$65,000

Audi A6

76 OVERALL SCORE

80 COMFORT SCORE

RIDE · NOISE · DRIVING POSITION · USABILITY · FRONT-SEAT COMFORT · REAR-SEAT COMFORT · FRONT ACCESS · REAR ACCESS

We appreciate the A6's elegant interior for its pleasing mix of high-quality materials. It can be a challenge to step over the wide doorsill, but the superb seats prove comfortable and supportive for multihour trips. They also boast a wide range of adjustments, including four-way lumbar support. The driving position is roomy, with plenty of adjustment range for the steering wheel, ample headroom, and supportive door and center armrests. The rear seat has lots of legroom and headroom for two adults, though sitting three across would be snug. Passengers are treated to a very quiet cabin with well-suppressed road and wind noise. While there is a firm edge to the ride quality, conveying road texture to the driver and passengers, the suspension does a good job of softening the jolt from potholes and ruts. The base four-cylinder's gruff sound is the only noise to mar the overall driving experience.

Runners-Up These models also ranked among the top vehicles in their class, having earned a high comfort score, along with a strong enough Overall Score to be CR Recommended.

Make + Model	Comfort Score	Comfort Factors								Overall Score
		Ride	Noise	Driving position	Usability	Front-seat comfort	Rear-seat comfort	Front access	Rear access	
COMPACT SUVs $35,000-$45,000										
Honda CR-V Hybrid 2.0H	78	▲	!	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	84
Hyundai Tucson Hybrid 1.6T+H	77	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	85
Hyundai Tucson 2.5L	77	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	82
Hyundai Tucson PHEV 1.6T+E	76	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	82
Toyota RAV4 Prime 2.5H+E	75	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	89
Nissan Rogue 1.5T	74	!	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	70
MIDSIZED 2-ROW SUVs $45,000-$55,000										
Ford Edge 2.0T	77	▲	▲	!	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	79
Honda Passport 3.5L	76	!	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	70
Nissan Murano 3.5L	75	▲	▲	!	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	69
MIDSIZED 3-ROW SUVs $45,000-$55,000										
Kia Telluride 3.8L	82	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	84
Honda Pilot 3.5L	81	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	77
Toyota Grand Highlander 2.4T	79	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	80
Hyundai Palisade 3.8L	78	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	83

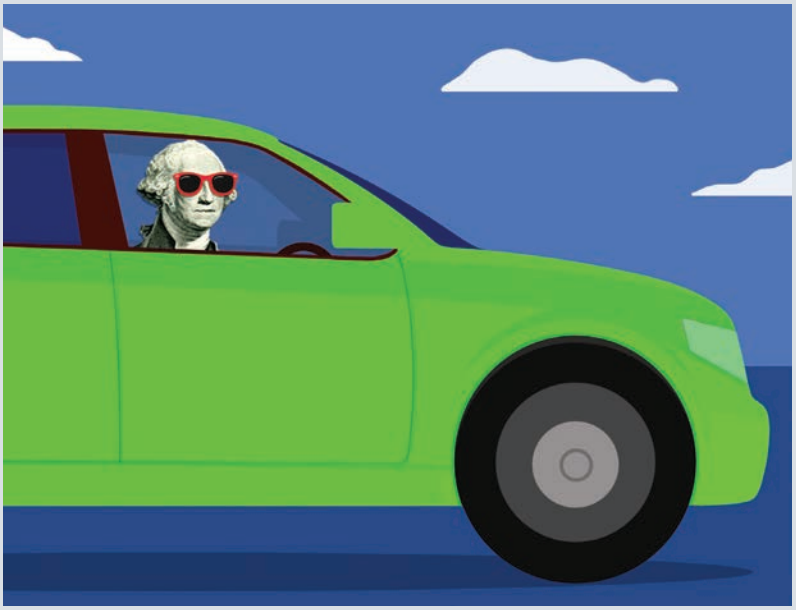
PHOTO: AUDI

Make + Model	Comfort Score	Comfort Factors								Overall Score
		Ride	Noise	Driving position	Usability	Front-seat comfort	Rear-seat comfort	Front access	Rear access	
MIDSIZED 3-ROW SUVs $45,000-$55,000 *Continued*										
✓ **Toyota Highlander** 2.4T	77	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	80
✓ **Toyota Highlander Hybrid** 2.5H	76	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	85
✓ **Kia Sorento Hybrid** 1.6T+H	76	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	77
✓ **Kia Sorento** 2.5T	74	!	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	72
LUXURY COMPACT SUVs $45,000-$55,000										
✓ **Audi Q3** 2.0T	77	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	70
✓ **Porsche Macan** 2.9T	74	!	▲▲	▲	!	▲▲	▲	▲	!	76
✓ **Buick Envision** 2.0T	72	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	69
✓ **Cadillac XT5** 3.6L	72	!	▲▲	!	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	71
LUXURY MIDSIZED/LARGE SUVs OVER $55,000										
✓ **BMW X7** 3.0T	84	▲	▲▲	▲	!	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	78
✓ **Audi Q7** 3.0T	83	▲	▲▲	▲	!	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	76
✓ **BMW X5** 3.0T	82	▲	▲▲	▲	!	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	92
✓ **Buick Enclave** 3.6L	79	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	77
✓ **Infiniti QX60** 3.5L	78	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	70
✓ **Cadillac XT6** 3.6L	76	▲	▲▲	!	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	72
MIDSIZED/LARGE CARS $35,000-$45,000										
✓ **Honda Accord Hybrid** 2.0H	76	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	!	▲	▲	▲	89
✓ **Honda Accord** 1.5T	75	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	!	▲	▲	▲	78
✓ **Nissan Altima** 2.5L	74	!	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	!	76
✓ **Toyota Crown** 2.5H	73	▲	▲	▲	!	▲	▲	▲	▲	78
✓ **Hyundai Sonata Hybrid** 2.0H	68	!	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	72
✓ **Hyundai Sonata** 2.5L	67	!	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲	74
LUXURY CARS $45,000-$65,000										
✓ **Audi A4** 2.0T	75	▲	▲▲	▲	!	▲▲	!	▲	!	71
✓ **Infiniti Q50** 3.0T	73	▲	▲	▲	!	▲	!	▲	!	74
✓ **Cadillac CT5** 2.0T	71	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	!	▲	!	69
✓ **Hyundai Ioniq 6** E	71	▲	▲▲	▲	!	▲	▲	▲	▲	83
✓ **BMW 330e xDrive** 2.0T+E	70	▲	▲	▲	!	▲▲	!	!	!	81
✓ **BMW 330i xDrive** 2.0T	69	!	▲	▲	!	▲▲	!	!	!	78

HOW WE TEST: Comfort Score is a composite of our comfort-oriented testing results, with ride given the most weight, based on a 100-point scale. **Overall Score** combines **road-test results,** survey data for **predicted reliability** and **owner satisfaction,** and **advanced safety,** which includes crash-test results and the availability of crash-prevention features, such as automatic emergency braking, pedestrian detection, blind spot warning, and rear cross traffic warning.

Get More for Your Used Car

BY BENJAMIN PRESTON



WHAT TO DO WITH A CAR you don't want anymore? You can trade it in for a new one, sell it to a dealer or to a private individual, or get a sight-unseen online offer for it. According to a recent survey of more than 14,000 Consumer Reports members, getting an instant cash offer online through a retailer such as CarMax or Carvana will get you the best price for your car and be the easiest overall experience. But each option has its pros and cons. If you're buying a new car, a trade-in could be the quickest way to get rid of your old car and also offers a tax benefit in some states.

Whatever you do, start by getting an idea of what your car is worth by using CR's Car Value Estimator (at **CR.org/tradein**). John Ibbotson, chief mechanic of CR's Auto Test Center, says there are a couple of ways to maximize the price you get. First, give the car a quick cleaning. Second, provide maintenance and service records that show you've taken good care of the car.

Below, we discuss each method of selling, from highest to lowest reported satisfaction rate among CR members.

TAKE AN INSTANT CASH OFFER

BEST FOR Paid-off, lower-mileage cars with a solid maintenance-record paper trail.
PROS You'll get an online offer within a few minutes that will be honored for several days and may be the most competitive option: In the CR survey, the majority of people who sold their car to Carvana got more for it than they expected.
CONS You might get more money selling an older, high-mileage car to an individual buyer.
WHAT TO DO It's as easy as entering your license plate number or vehicle identification number (VIN) and answering a few simple questions about your car's condition.
SATISFACTION RATE 62%

SELL IT TO AN INDIVIDUAL

BEST FOR Older or higher-mileage cars that are paid off and in good condition.
PROS Selling to someone privately will probably get the highest price for an older car. CR members who sold to individuals in person were far more satisfied than those who sold to individuals online.
CONS Higher potential for having to haggle and handle difficult buyers, no-shows, and scammers.
WHAT TO DO Always meet strangers in a secure public location, such as a gas station or supermarket parking lot. Professional detailing may result in a higher price.
SATISFACTION RATE 58%

SELL IT TO A DEALER

BEST FOR Newer used cars, lower-priced models in high demand (those that sell for $22,000 or less), cars worth less than their loan balance.
PROS You'll get roughly the same amount of money as a trade-in, but unlike a trade-in, you don't have to sell to the dealer you're buying another car from.
CONS If you have an older, higher-mileage, or low-demand car, there are other ways to get more money. Also, you'll probably have to make an in-person appraisal appointment.
WHAT TO DO Go to multiple dealers to find the one offering the best price. (The dealership that serviced the car should be able to offer a price by phone.)
SATISFACTION RATE 51%

TRADE IT IN

BEST FOR Newer used cars that are still being paid off.
PROS This can be the fastest way to get rid of your old car and get a new one; the trade-in value will also help defray the cost of financing the new car purchase. In some states, you'll pay sales tax only on the price of the new car minus the value of the trade-in.
CONS Typically yields less money than selling to an individual: Most CR members who traded in got less than they expected.
WHAT TO DO Lock in the new-car price before negotiating the trade-in. Some dealers offset a good trade-in price by inflating the new-car purchase price.
SATISFACTION RATE 34%

ILLUSTRATION BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

ROAD TEST

EXCLUSIVE RATINGS & REVIEWS
BASED ON TESTING AT CR'S
327-ACRE AUTO TEST CENTER

LUXURY COMPACT PHEV SUVs

Volvo XC60 PHEV

Fast and Responsive but Not So Reliable

56
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 86

HIGHS Quick acceleration, great mpg, short stops, comfy seats

LOWS Stiff ride, unintuitive controls, below-average reliability

POWERTRAIN 455-hp, 2.0-liter turbo 4-cylinder plug-in hybrid engine; 8-speed automatic; all-wheel drive

RANGE 35 miles EV[E] + 525 miles gas

FUEL 28 mpg on premium

PRICE $59,395-$76,745 base price + $1,295 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $67,290

THE PLUG-IN hybrid electric vehicle (PHEV) version of Volvo's XC60 elevates this luxury compact SUV considerably. It has the ability to drive on electric power for an EPA-estimated 35 miles, and the whopping 455 hp it has on tap provides super-quick acceleration. But like the rest of the XC60 line, it suffers from convoluted controls, a stiff ride, and below-average reliability.

It has stronger electric-only power than most PHEVs we've tested and rarely requires assistance from the gas engine, even when accelerating with some vigor. Once the battery is depleted, the XC60 transitions into smooth and unobtrusive hybrid operation. Summon the full power it has onboard and the XC60 PHEV scoots from 0 to 60 mph in a mighty quick 4.8 seconds.

With the PHEV battery drained, we measured 28 mpg when operating as a regular hybrid, a 5-mpg improvement over the conventional XC60. It takes a lengthy 17 hours to recharge the 18.8-kWh battery on a 120-volt household outlet, so buyers may want to invest in a 240-volt EV charger to cut that time to about 5 hours.

We enjoyed the XC60's taut and responsive handling, which instills confidence through corners. As is typical of Volvos lately, the ride can feel unyielding, with bumps and ruts striking through in a pronounced way. Unlike many hybrids, the brake pedal has a firm, easy-to-modulate feel.

But the XC60's controls remain unintuitive. Many tasks require multiple steps, whether it's changing a radio station or setting the cabin temperature. Adding to the confusion are unlabeled steering wheel controls that have more than one function.

ELECTRIC SUVs

Chevrolet Blazer EV

Odd Controls and a Bumpy Ride

56
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 68

HIGHS Smooth acceleration, qualifies for $7,500 federal tax credit

LOWS Slow steering, stiff ride, long stopping distances, low dashboard air vents, no Android Auto or Apple CarPlay

POWERTRAIN 288-hp, dual electric motors; 1-speed direct-drive; all-wheel drive

RANGE 279 miles[E]

PRICE $48,800-$56,000 base price + $1,395 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $60,000

ON PAPER, the Blazer EV seems like it should be a slam-dunk: an electric SUV with a long range and relatively quick home charging, potentially igniting a new-era war with the Ford Mustang Mach-E. But it suffers from a stiff ride, lackluster steering, and long braking distances. Plus, it ditches Android Auto and Apple CarPlay compatibility for custom Google software. That move alone could be a deal breaker for some buyers.

The powertrain is a bright spot. It's smooth and measured without being too snappy as in some EVs. But its 6.3-second 0-to-60-mph time is about a second slower than most competitors. We found the "one-pedal driving" mode (in which you control the car's acceleration and braking with just the accelerator pedal) smooth to operate. But panic-brake stopping distances were long.

Any hopes for sporty handling were dashed by dull and rather slow steering that telegraphs little to the driver about tire grip. The ride is too stiff, partly due to the large, low-profile 21-inch tires. There's also a lot of suspension noise over bumps. Hit a pothole and you'll hear a clunk, which makes the Blazer EV seem unrefined.

The front seats look attractive, but there's scant support from the side bolsters. There's a lot of room in the rear seat, though comfort is compromised by the protruding child-seat anchors.

The infotainment screen's tiny buttons are hard to select while driving. Also, certain apps, such as for navigation, take over the entire display without a split-screen option.

The Blazer EV comes with all the important active safety features except for highway-speed AEB, which is optional.

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

[E]EPA-estimated range.

LUXURY MIDSIZED SEDANS

BMW 5 Series

Superb Powertrain, Finicky Controls

83
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 91

HIGHS Smooth engine/transmission, agile handling, strong brakes, impressive mpg, comfortable front seats, high-quality cabin

LOWS Controls require a steep learning curve

POWERTRAIN 255-hp, 2.0-liter turbo 4-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; AWD

FUEL 29 mpg on premium

PRICE $57,900-$64,900 base price + $995 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $71,545

THE REDESIGNED 5 Series ups the ante on refinement, technology, and fuel economy, with a stellar road-test score that puts it at the top of its segment. Its biggest downside is that the controls have become more difficult to use.

The 530i xDrive's powertrain is superb. The 255-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder engine provides energetic and refined forward thrust, while the eight-speed automatic delivers serenely smooth shifts. It not only is quicker than before but also sees a 3-mpg boost in fuel economy. We're also testing the fully electric i5.

Handling is taut and balanced, endowing the 530i with a controlled and solid feel. But we were disappointed by the steering, which is overly light and vague. The firm ride is relatively pampering, considering the car's keen handling. Panic-brake stopping distances are impressively short, and the cabin is very quiet.

The front seats are well-shaped and supportive, both of them equipped with four-way lumbar adjustment, which aids comfort on long drives. Rear-seat room is on the smaller side among midsized luxury sedans, though we found it comfortable (in spite of the seatback's upright angle), thanks to the generous underleg support.

Although the updated infotainment system—which consists of a massive center touchscreen and a digital instrument panel—is highly customizable, the overload of information it offers draws the driver's eyes away from the road. We also don't like the fact that basic climate control tasks require extra steps, such as adjusting the fan speed, airflow mode, or heated seats.

MIDSIZED THREE-ROW SUVs

Volkswagen Atlas

Super-Roomy Cabin but Mediocre MPG

59
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 78

HIGHS Nicely finished cabin, roomy third row, generous cargo capacity, short stopping distances

LOWS Confusing controls, turbo-four fuel mileage isn't better than previous V6, reliability

POWERTRAIN 269-hp, 2.0-liter turbo 4-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; AWD

FUEL 20 mpg on regular

PRICE $37,995-$52,890 base price + $1,425 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $47,121

AFTER A MINOR REFRESH, the Atlas remains a functional midsized SUV graced with a well-crafted cabin and one of the roomier third-row seats in its class. But its controls have gotten confusing, and the switch from a V6 engine to a turbo four-cylinder didn't improve fuel efficiency.

The 269-hp turbo-four packs a good punch, and it's a second quicker to 60 mph than the previous V6. But it's not as smooth, and fuel economy remains a low 20 mpg overall, 1 to 2 mpg behind most competitors.

Handling agility is decent for the class, but the steering feels rather light and loose. The Atlas did well when pushed to its limits around our track, though, and it managed impressively short stopping distances. The ride isn't quite as comfortable as it was in the previous version because of larger wheels and tires and a firm suspension. Rougher pavement brings some noticeably hard hits.

Taller drivers found the front seats comfortable, while those with shorter legs said the bottom cushion is too long; the armrests are also low and faraway. The second-row seat has lots of headroom, but the bottom cushion is light on leg support. The third row is one of the more comfortable in the class due to the bottom cushion's height off the floor. It's also one of the easiest to get into, thanks to a nifty mechanism that tilts and slides the second-row seat forward. At 50.5 cubic feet, the Atlas offers more cargo room than many of its rivals.

Most climate controls are now within the confusing infotainment touchscreen. We also found the customizable driver's instrument panel to be complex and distracting to use while on the road.

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

Ratings › **4 Models, 1 Recommended Vehicle** We tested a fine-driving midsized luxury sedan plus a lackluster EV, an unreliable PHEV, and a three-row SUV that's gone downhill.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results										ADAS
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	Seat comfort, front/rear	Usability	Noise	Ride	Fit + finish	Routine handling	Acceleration, 0–60 mph, sec.	Dry braking, 60–0 mph, ft.	BSW/RCTW
LUXURY MIDSIZED SEDANS																
✓ **BMW 530i** 2.0T	83	$71,545	1	⌃	91	29	465	⌃⌃ / ⌃	⌄	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	6.6	122	S
✓ **Audi A6** 2.0T	76	$59,390	1	⌄	91	26	505	⌃⌃ / ⌃⌃	1	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	6.8	129	O
✓ **Genesis G80** 2.5T	74	$56,920	1	⌃	86	24	455	⌃⌃ / ⌃⌃	⌄⌄	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	6.8	128	S
LUXURY COMPACT SUVs																
✓ **BMW X3** 2.0T	86	$53,745	⌃	⌃	90	24	410	⌃⌃ / ⌃	1	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	7.7	128	S
✓ **Lexus NX350h** 2.5H	83	$47,590	⌃	⌃	84	38	550	⌃ / ⌃	⌄	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	7.6	138	S
Volvo XC60 2.0T	60	$50,040	⌄	⌄	77	23	430	⌃⌃ / ⌃	⌄	⌃	1	⌃⌃	⌃	8.0	124	S
Volvo XC60 PHEV 2.0T+E	56	$67,290	⌄	⌄	86	28	35[E] + 525	⌃⌃ / ⌃	⌄⌄	⌃	1	⌃⌃	⌃	4.8	129	S
MIDSIZED THREE-ROW SUVs																
✓ **Kia Telluride** 3.8L	84	$40,855	1	⌃⌃	92	21	390	⌃ / ⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	1	7.2	127	S
✓ **Hyundai Palisade** 3.8L	83	$43,415	⌃	⌃	85	21	395	⌃ / ⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	1	7.1	132	S
✓ **Mazda CX-90** 3.3T	82	$48,670	⌃	⌄	85	24	435	⌃ / ⌃	⌄	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	7.2	128	S
✓ **Toyota Grand Highlander** 2.4T	80	$49,457	⌃	⌃	81	22	390	⌃ / ⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	1	8.0	134	S
✓ **Subaru Ascent** 2.4T	79	$43,867	1	⌃	90	22	420	⌃ / ⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	1	8.0	129	O
✓ **Honda Pilot** 3.5L	77	$50,240	1	⌃⌃	85	21	380	⌃ / ⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	1	7.7	129	S
Nissan Pathfinder 3.5L	62	$46,375	⌄	⌄	81	21	385	⌃ / ⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	1	⌃	⌃	7.6	138	S
Ford Explorer 2.3T	60	$49,940	⌄	⌄	74	21	370	⌃ / ⌃	⌃	⌃	1	⌃	⌃	7.4	136	S
Volkswagen Atlas 2.0T	59	$47,121	⌄	⌄	78	20	360	⌃ / ⌃⌃	⌄	⌃	1	⌃⌃	⌃	7.7	124	S
ELECTRIC SUVs																
✓ **Kia EV6**	77	$52,840	1	⌃	86	NA	277	⌃ / 1	1	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	4.7	126	S
✓ **Tesla Model Y**	72	$61,190	1	⌃	88	NA	330[E]	⌃⌃ / ⌃	⌄⌄	⌃	⌄	⌃	⌃⌃	4.7	121	–
✓ **Nissan Ariya**	70	$63,020	⌃	⌃	70	NA	253	⌃ / ⌃	1	⌃	1	⌃	⌃	5.4	130	S
✓ **Ford Mustang Mach-E**	70	$55,800	1	⌃	74	NA	299	⌃ / ⌃	1	⌃⌃	1	⌃	⌃⌃	5.3	136	S
Hyundai Ioniq 5	67	$51,020	⌄	⌃	86	NA	267	⌃ / ⌃	1	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	4.7	131	S
Chevrolet Blazer EV	56	$60,000	⌄	⌃	68	NA	279[E]	1 / ⌃	1	⌃	1	⌃	⌃	6.3	139	S

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/cars. When you're ready to buy, configure the vehicle and find the best price in your area by clicking the green "View Pricing Information" button on the model's dedicated page.

HOW WE TEST: The **Overall Score** combines **road-test results,** survey data for **predicted reliability** and **owner satisfaction**, and **advanced safety,** which includes crash-test results and the availability of crash-prevention features, such as automatic emergency braking, pedestrian detection, blind spot warning, and rear cross traffic warning. A dash (–) means no such safety system is offered; O means that it's optional on at least some trim levels; S means that the feature is standard on all trims. We deduct points if a model's active driving assistance system has inadequate direct driver monitoring.

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The Better Deal

Many of the products we test at CR earn high ratings for their impressive performance—but some are also a really great value. They have most (if not all) of the attributes of other top-rated products at a much lower price. Check out the deals we found for you this month.

SMALL HATCHBACKS

BUICK ENVISTA
$22,400-$28,600 **65**

KIA SOUL
$20,190-$24,490 **73**

THE BETTER DEAL

THE LOWDOWN

THE ALL-NEW BUICK ENVISTA is a stylish, efficient subcompact that offers luxury-brand appeal at a lower price. However, its hesitant powertrain, uncomfortable front seats, and low-end interior details detract from the driving experience. For less money, the Kia Soul is a smart alternative. Like the Buick, it's brimming with convenience features and generous passenger room. Pick the S trim, $22,690, for added comfort, a power driver's seat, a larger center screen, blind spot warning, and rear cross traffic warning.

FULL-SIZED BLENDERS

VITAMIX ASCENT SERIES A3500
$700 **77**

THE BETTER DEAL

NINJA PROFESSIONAL PLUS KITCHEN SYSTEM BN801
$220 **82**

THE LOWDOWN

BOTH OF THESE powerful blenders stood out in our tests for making smoothies, puréeing, crushing ice, and more. The Vitamix has higher reliability and owner satisfaction scores from our surveys—but the Ninja also scores very well for both, and our testers judge it easier to use. It has a removable blade for quicker cleaning, and it's lighter than the Vitamix (9 pounds vs. 15 pounds), which helps if you need to move it around. The Vitamix has 15 speeds; the Ninja has only five, but it comes with extras, including a food chopper and a dough hook—not to mention some serious savings.

FITNESS TRACKERS

GARMIN VIVOSMART 5
$150 **76**

THE BETTER DEAL

AMAZFIT BAND 7
$50 **79**

THE LOWDOWN

IT'S NOT FROM a brand as well known as Garmin, but the Amazfit tracker is higher-rated, with better overall performance, longer battery life, more features, and a color display—for a third of the money. The Garmin does boast slightly more accurate step-counting but otherwise doesn't earn its much higher price.

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